

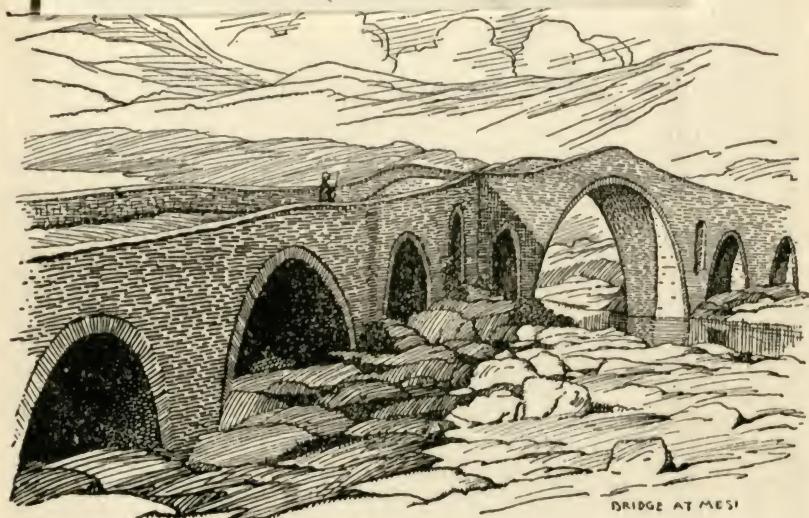
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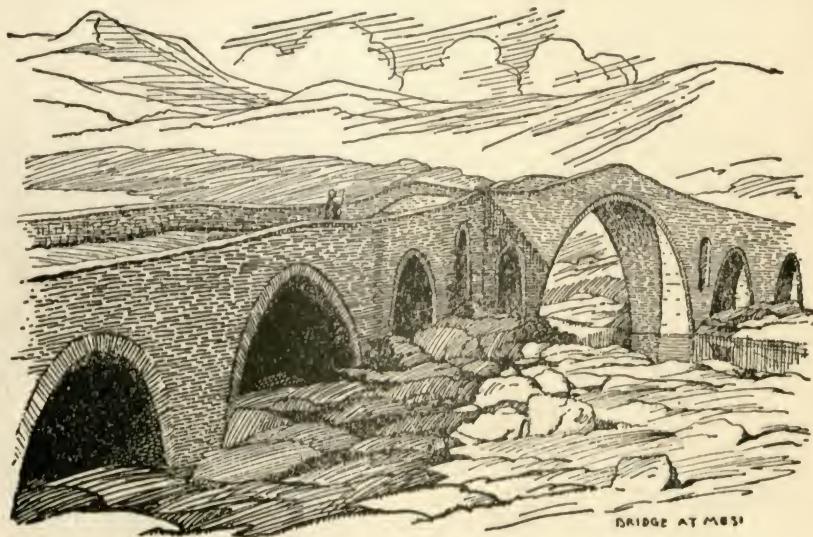


Brown
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SEA





ALBANIA

The Land of the Eagle People



• "The least visited, least known, most un-European country in Europe, Albania is as scenic as a back-drop in a theater. It is about the only country in Europe which cannot be reached by railway. If you would visit it, you must go by sea or air, though there is a motor road of sorts leading down from Dalmatia to its back door. Its front door is Durazzo, a town whose history goes back into the past for twenty-seven centuries, to which a little steamer comes waddling across the Adriatic from the Italian port of Bari. I crossed by seaplane from Brindisi to Valona, farther down the coast.

"Albania is a beautiful country to fly over. Brooding forests cover the lower slopes of mountains whose summits scrape the sky. Italian cypresses, dark and slender, rear themselves against white and pink and yellow walls. Above the spreading olive groves rise the towers of Christian churches and the minarets of Moslem mosques. Through the winding, cobbled streets of the hill-towns stalk picturesque figures in braided jackets and starched white kilts.

"The Albanians, assert the ethnologists, are the most ancient race in southeastern Europe. Neither legend nor history affords any record of their arrival in the Balkan Peninsula, but they are believed to be the descendants of the first Aryan immigrants, who, leaving the birthplace of the white race beside the Caspian shore, entered Europe through the Caucasus. They have to a great extent remained unaffected by foreign influences, retaining their original language and preserving the customs and institutions handed down from remote antiquity. I know of no people in Europe in greater need of education or who would more largely profit by it.

"The Albanian women are, as a rule, slim and often very beautiful, particularly when clad in their picturesque gala costumes. This gala dress is an expensive affair, and it is the most beautiful and becoming costume to be found in Europe.

"In Albania you have the feeling that romance lurks just around the corner. It is the sort of land in which almost anything might happen. It is the last of the little kingdoms. King Zog, the reigning sovereign, is young, brave, handsome, engaging, and capable, I suspect, of being a great lover, who cannot find a bride. He is one of the youngest sovereigns in Europe, and the only bachelor one.

"If you are prepared to sacrifice your comforts and luxuries for the sake of the unusual, the colorful and the picturesque, go to Albania. But go before it has been spoiled!"

—E. ALEXANDER POWELL, noted author and world-traveler.



NEXHMIE ZAIMI

DAUGHTER OF THE EAGLE

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF
AN ALBANIAN GIRL

NEXHMIE ZAIMI



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DAUGHTER OF THE EAGLE

by

Nexhmie Zaimi

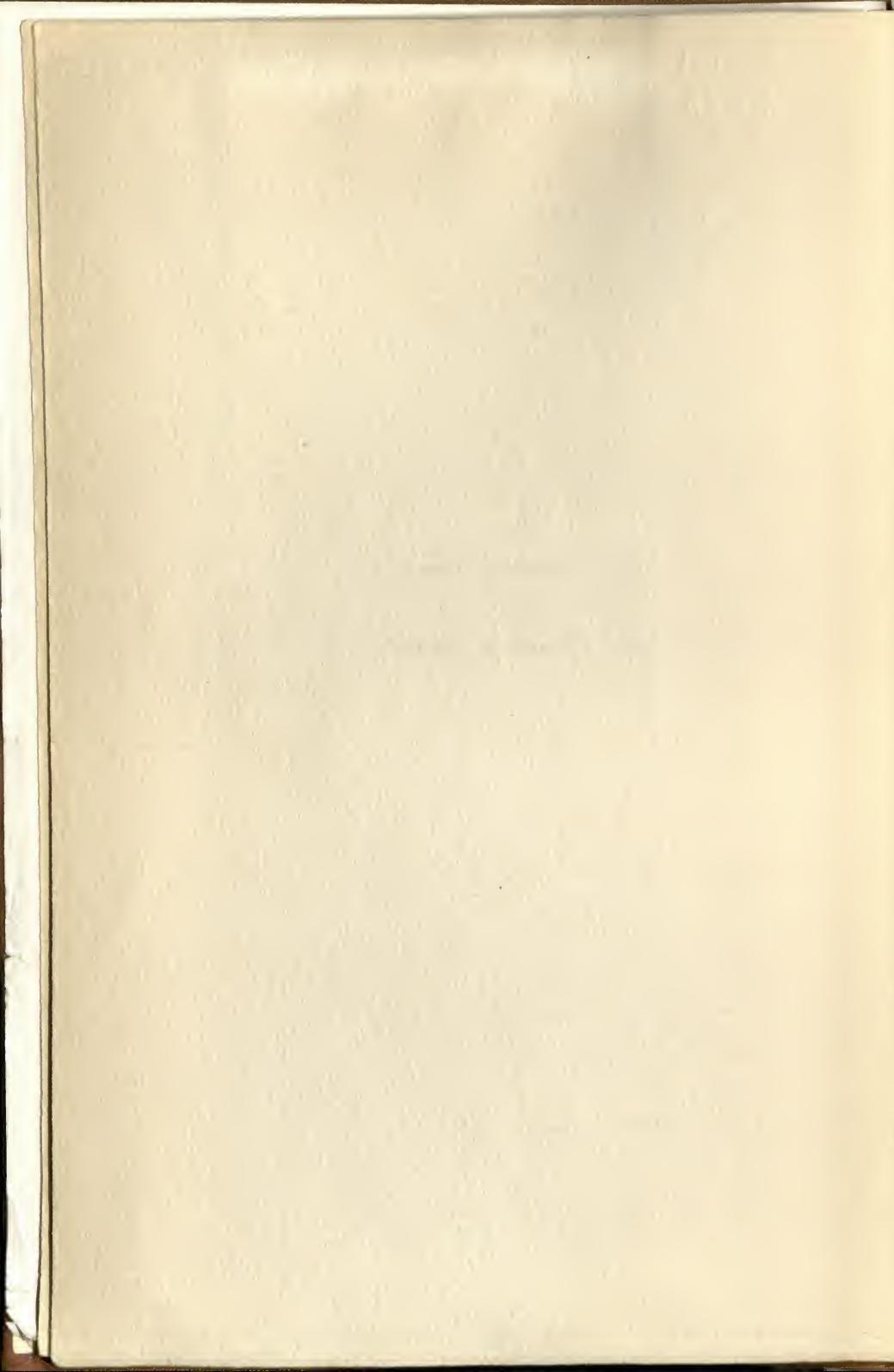
• Idyllic, grim and genuinely humorous, by turns—but always shrewd and informative —this is the story of the author's childhood and coming of age in the "Eagle Land," her native Albania.

The first book ever written in English by a "new" Albanian, it presents in quaint and charming style the dramatic conflict between the country's ancient and picturesque customs and the modern trends of today.

She begins with her earliest recollections, as a child of three or four, in a flower-covered land perched among bleak, forbidding rocks, with the Adriatic Sea rolling and breaking at the foot of mountain slopes covered with vines, figs and olive trees. She continues her story through an exciting childhood, joyous and gay in sweet summer evenings when the goatherds' flutes, "a melody of sadness," echoed from the hills—but strange and terrible when the "big winds" came, five or six times yearly, raging in from the Adriatic to "hurl men to the street like rags, splinter the olive trees, and rip off the roofs of houses with their hundreds of nesting swans."

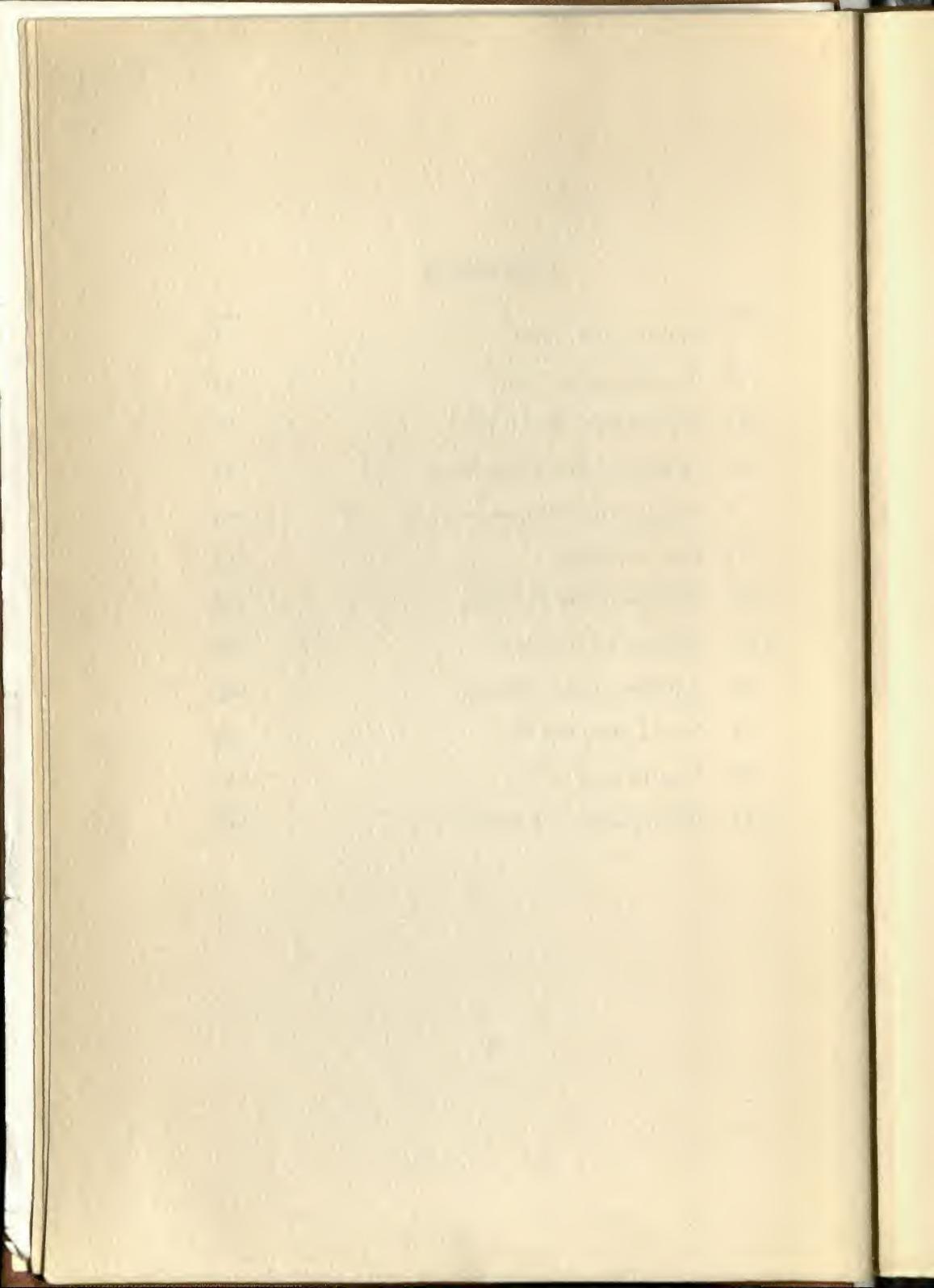
The years of her girlhood present a first-hand picture of great interest and historic value of a land newly given its freedom and national independence after centuries of oppression. The author's defiance of age-old traditions for women, her refusal to be "shut in" a veil, her unshakable determination to obtain a higher education—the greatest of humiliations to her family—all make a stirring story which the reader will not soon forget.

Nexhmie Zaimi, the only Albanian girl ever to come alone to this country, is now a student at Wellesley College. She is twenty-two years old. The name Nexhmie means "Morning Star" and is pronounced Nej-mee-ah.



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DAUGHTER
OF THE
EAGLE

Chapter I

HANIFE'S WEDDING

NEVER shall I forget the day my sister's fiancé came to our house to meet my parents. Her wedding a week later —yes, that was tremendously exciting, too, to a child of my age. I was then six years old. But Gani's coming, delayed so long because he was in the United States when the engagement to Hanife had been arranged six months earlier, is memorable because it was our first chance to see him grown up.

How well I recall that afternoon and the suspense of waiting for him. It was spring, but very hot as only a Southern Albanian spring can be. Even the sea breezes from the Adriatic which fanned our little coast town of Krip brought no relief. The living room, where Mother and Father and I (though I had no business to be around) were waiting to receive Gani, was stifling. At the open French windows the white curtains hung limp in the calm air. Because the window ledges offered some promise of a breeze, I curled up in one that had a large bowl of red carnations, sweet-smelling and spicy, set festively in its center. The ledge overlooked the courtyard

and gave me a fine view of the front gate where our visitors, Gani and his escorts, would appear shortly. Ever since Pilo, the coachman, had taken the horse and wagon to Valona to bring them here, we had been waiting patiently, though we knew the three miles' journey over the winding wagon trails would take several hours.

My parents sat on low shiltes, or floor mattresses, by the fire-place at the end of the room. They had not stirred since lunch time. Finally I heard them break their long silence.

"Allah only knows what sort of man my daughter is marrying." Mother spoke with a hearty sigh. She looked at Father, expecting to be comforted in some way. He did not speak, but raised his dark eyebrows and cast her a look of accusation which had no sympathy in it.

"Hanife," Mother persisted, "who is not yet fifteen years old, will become the wife of a man about whom we know nothing except that he is Ismet Efendi's brother and is returning from America with a bag of money in his satchel."

Father frowned, but let her go on.

"My poor girl! Gani may be another vagabond like Lala's son, toiling in that far land for a few napoleons, only to come back to Albania with chopped fingers and stooped shoulders." As Mother sat cross-legged on her shilte opposite Father, who occupied the place of honor at the right side of the hearth, she pressed her hands

HANIFE'S WEDDING

against her knees. Nervously her frail body swayed to and fro. Her swaying motion angered Father, whose patience I could see was at an end. A storm was brewing now; his deep blue eyes were blazing as he got up. Puffing out a big cloud of cigarette smoke, he turned to his wife.

"You women!" he almost shouted at her: for he was just as excited as she over Gani's coming. "All you think of is a man's looks. What if Gani should come back with only eight fingers instead of ten? Does it matter? As long as he has bread enough to feed Hano, that is the main concern."

"True enough, you husband," Mother replied quietly. "Yet why did we hurry to accept this offer for Hano's marriage? She is not over age. We have had many other proposals for her. Why did we not wait at least until we had seen the young man?"

"Hush, Wife, and attend to your own affairs. That was my duty, and I know what I did."

The argument went on between the two. But then, what parents can there be who don't have to go through such worries and talks for months until their daughter is married? But neither will the worry end here; for new ones begin: "Will our girl be a good wife and cook decent meals? Will she have children? And most important of all, will she get along well with her husband's family?"

After a while Father's voice became calmer. Pushing

his black fez away from his forehead, he said: "Be assured, Wife, Gani will be like other young chaps coming home from the big countries. With a blue suit, and a green shirt, and a gold tooth to beautify his smile: that is how your son-in-law will look." He chuckled over this picture he described. The storm was over.

Mother's anxiety over her young daughter's marriage was natural, though she had better reason to be content than most Albanian mothers. For Gani was the brother of the most intimate friend of the family, Ismet Mersin, who held a government position in Tirana. It was Ismet who had arranged the engagement. When Gani had finished his education in Turkey, where the schools are considered the best, and had gone to America to make some money, Ismet thought it was time that he should have a wife. As older brother, therefore, he began looking about for a bride. Ever since she was a little girl, Hano had pleased him well. He had watched her closely on his many visits to our house, and decided Hano was a promising housewife for Gani. Besides, it also counted for something that she was pretty. At a formal meeting he made the proposal to Father, and between them the marriage bonds were tied: rings were exchanged, and that closed the matter. Not until then did Gani know a bride would "cross his threshold" when he returned from America.

I was getting very restless in my seat in the window,

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so when the conversation between my parents quieted down, I slid from the ledge in a hurry. Smoothing out the ruffled folds of my long guest dress, of which I was very proud, I ran across the room to Mother. I must ask her a question that had burned in my stomach all day, as we say in my country.

"Mana," I whispered, "aren't you going to send Hano away before her Gani comes?"

Mother was still too upset to pay any attention to me. She sat stiffly on her shilte. The strain of waiting for our visitor began to show in wrinkles on her forehead; her cheeks had a flush on them. Her eyes wandered to the windows as she strained to hear the first sounds of the wagon returning from Valona. Father was restless, too. He tried to hide his nervousness. Smoking cigarette after cigarette until the ash tray spilled over the edges, he paced up and down the floor. At last he took out his gold watch, which was hooked to a jewel-ornamented chain that glittered across the vest of his European suit. Glancing at Mother, he announced it was nearly five o'clock.

"Collect your mind, now, Wife," he said; "Gani will be here any minute. Has the guest room been made ready?"

Quietly she got up and, with me close behind her, entered a large airy chamber used only for guests. Gani would stay a half-hour at the most, yet for the tenth time that day Mother carefully tidied the room where

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he and his escorts might leave their fezes and sun umbrellas if they wished. She moved from one side of the room to the other; fixed a pillow here, smoothed the couch covers there; pulled her skirt into place. Her hands trembled a little, so great was her anxiety over the first meeting with her son-in-law. She brushed off her blouse front, blew at her sleeves, and, finding nothing else to do, she clasped her hands over her head.

“Oh, Lord forgive me!” she murmured to herself, suddenly realizing that her gesture was a sin. It is a motion used only when a calamity has happened—Allah forbid!—such as a death. Her hands touched her brown hair showing at her forehead from beneath a brown-silk headkerchief. Her hair was turning white at the temples—white threads that had grown there not from age, for she was but twenty-nine years old, but from worries. Indeed, worries were not few since her marriage day fifteen years ago. Now this new concern over losing her daughter, and the back-breaking strain of wedding preparations that would fill the next week, added fresh threads of silver to the lovely head.

Again I interrupted her troubled thoughts with my prattle.

“Mana, you forgot to send Hano away today. Will she stay in the house when Gani Efendi comes?”

“Lipsu—hurry; do get out of my way, Nexhmie,” my mother said irritably.

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"But, Mana, can't I see my brother-in-law when he comes?"

"No, it is a shame for girls to be present when any men guests arrive; and you know it. Now do go away, Nexhmo, and stay away."

My feet took wings and I flew, not outside as I should have, but straight to the kitchen where I hoped Hanife would give me a better welcome.

Since early morning Hano had been shut up in the kitchen, the windows and doors tightly closed. In Albania, the bride, as she already is called, is supposed to know nothing of her marriage plans from the time of her engagement until her wedding day. But Hano knew quite well what was afoot. Some months ago she and I had slyly discovered the engagement ring, where my parents had put it away in a closet. A beautiful ring it was, with a large green shining stone and many little white ones glittering around it. More recently, we had run across a mysterious big box. Opening the lid and peeping inside, we found such beautiful clothes as only a princess in story books wore. Holding a fragile garment against her slight figure, my sister exclaimed that it would fit her exactly! Certainly, for they were the bride's clothes Gani had sent from Valona, as all grooms are expected to do.

As I burst into the kitchen that warm day, Hano was sitting silently by the fire-place, resting her chin in her

hands. In the air was the odor of delicious coffee cooking, now evaporated for the third time that afternoon, and of sweetmeats. I noticed that a change had come over Hano. Her round face tried so hard to be dignified as she looked at me, rushing toward her. But her behavior did not frighten me. After listening to my parents arguing, and being brushed away like a fly by Mother, I had to talk to someone about the great event.

“Hano,” I began to tease her, “your husband is coming soon. Father just looked at his watch and said Gani is almost here. Aren’t you ashamed that in a week you will have a husband?” I giggled mischievously and yet was on my toes to run, knowing too well what Sister would do to me. Hano smiled and told me to go away. Encouraged by her gentleness, I shouted, “Hano is laughing,” so all the household could hear; “Hano is happy for Gani Efendi is coming.”

Sister looked horrified. Oh, the disgrace if our parents caught us discussing the subject of marriage! Tears of anger and shame rolled from her blue eyes. Quick as a cat, she was after me. She shoved me hard, I stumbled backwards into a large upended box . . . and just then the rattle of wagon wheels sounded outside. My bleeding scratches forgotten, I hastened to tell Mother that Gani had arrived.

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My parents already were standing at the doorway, composing themselves for the meeting. "Allah Bismillahi," Mother was saying to herself—praying words they were, to give her courage. There she stood, a straight, calm figure now; all traces of worry had disappeared. Once more she gave a swift touch to her black silk skirt with the back of her hands. Wetting the tips of her fingers, which no longer trembled, she smoothed her eyebrows as if to brush away the weight of her cares.

Soon the buzzing murmur of strangers and the click of the gate announced our visitors. And here at last was Gani, approaching us up the courtyard path with two friends—he in the center, walking with his head high and glancing to left and right, just as if he were not the groom. "A shameless young man" would be an old woman's remark if she chanced to watch Gani's entrance. His black moustache was "chopped off like our cat's tail," as Sister once said of another suitable young man. But what interested me more was his shirt, to see whether it was green. "No, his shirt is blue," I said to myself while I stood near my parents, already disobeying Mother's orders. "Will he have a gold tooth, at least?" I wondered next. I looked constantly at him to see whether his teeth would show in a smile. But no, he did not smile at all; not even when he greeted my parents at the door.

“Tungjatjeta—long life to you,” was my father’s greeting.

“Tungjatjeta,” replied the three young men.

“Urdhero—you are welcome here,” Mother said formally, showing them to a couch.

Gani sat down very stiffly and took off his fez. His rosy complexion stood out in contrast to his dark brown hair, which was set in crusty waves and shone as if it had been brushed back with chicken grease. His ears were too large for an aristocrat. Among Albanians, small ears are a symbol of being well-born. My observation of Gani’s, standing out from his head a little, made me sniff with superiority. It mattered not to me that his father, so we had been told, was a distinguished Moslem priest in Turkey, and therefore one of our equals. But I could not help admiring his American clothes. The well-tailored blue suit, evidence of his prosperity, hugged his slim figure. And what lovely shoes he wore, of brown suède, which no one else in Krip could afford! Lucky Hanife!

The meeting between a groom and his in-laws is always a formal occasion. For weeks ahead of time they plan what will be said, always remembering that no mention of marriage is permitted. Everyone must be careful that what he says does not mean something that has to do with the wedding, either directly or indirectly.

Gani’s manners before my parents were perfect. He appeared to be a bashful, polite young man—though in

HANIFE'S WEDDING

truth he was far from shy. He spoke only when a question was asked; he did not smile, nor did he smoke. He sat on the cambric-covered couch straight as a ramrod.

Finally, when etiquette allowed the conversation to be less formal, Sotira, our maid servant, came in with a tray of refreshments, which are always served before the guests leave. Old Sotira, in an enormous white apron and with a white jashmak wrapped around her head, walked softly on bare feet as she passed small cups of thick coffee and a large jar of purple eggplant jam. Gani helped himself to the jam with a long spoon, and tasted it delicately. Much to my surprise, he refused to take coffee. The sissy! ¹¹¹

"How do you like Albania, my boy, after being in such a big country?" Father was saying. For the first time during the meeting, he smiled. Gani began to speak, automatically crossing his legs and quickly uncrossing them again.

"More than ever," he replied, a little embarrassed as his foot slid slowly down.

After a few more words were spoken, there was nothing else for anyone to say. Our guests arose to go. At the doorway, Gani kissed the hand first of my father, then of my mother. They in turn kissed him on the cheek.

As the company was walking down the path that led to the gate, my sharp eyes suddenly looked toward the kitchen window, which was at right angles to the door-

way. The shutters were opening slightly. Then I realized that Sister was peeping to see her future husband. The painful scratches which I received an hour ago but had had no time to complain about reminded me that this was a good chance to take my revenge.

“Look, Gani Efendi, look! Hano is trying to see you from the kitchen window!” But Gani, blushing furiously and with some pleasure, looked straight ahead of him as he hurried on. . . .

Mother’s lips turned white, her whole face was pale, and Father was too angry to speak. To expose the secret that Sister was in the house, and with my loud voice proclaim it to the neighbors who had collected at the gate in order to get a glimpse of the long-awaited groom, was to my parents embarrassing in the extreme. But what was worse still, Hano had violated a serious rule. We have a superstitious belief that the bride and groom are not to see each other under any circumstances until the night of the wedding. Death is said to break their happiness if they look each other in the face before then.

For a girl reared as carefully as my sister had been to tempt fate and bring scandal to her family seemed beyond my parents’ belief. When she was twelve years old they had bundled her into the black tcharchaff, a long veil which concealed her figure from head to toe. This garb is what all Albanian girls must wear at the first sign of

HANIFE'S WEDDING

ripening womanhood. Hano matured earlier than most, but my parents, who were liberal in other ways, would rather cut her happy childhood abruptly than arouse the criticism of their neighbors. So the tcharchaff went on, and the training for wifehood began at an age when children in other lands were still thinking of dolls. Looking back at the incident of her spying at the window, I realize that Hano, even then, rebelled against the old traditions and superstitions just as she does today by wearing modern dress. As for her marriage, it turned out happy and successful after all, just as Gani's visit that day turned out happily. For at his parting, loud praises were expressed by the neighbors chatting with Mother at the gate.

"Oh, he was like a summer dove," said one. And another, quoting our proverb, exclaimed, "The pot found its lid, Sherife Hanem."

III

The week before her wedding, Hanife's bedroom looked like an exhibition chamber. Her trousseau was hung on the walls and draped over the rafters. All guests who came to the house that week took a peep into the room to see the gorgeous embroideries, the number of lace-covered slips and ruffled petticoats which made up

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Sister's marriage set. But on Sunday morning, the wedding day, the decorated room was dismantled, and became instead the scene of "dressing the bride," a long and tedious ceremony.

With Ikbal, one of my playmates, I tried to sneak into the room where Hano had been taken early in the morning. A young woman, Fatime, herself a new bride as was proper, met us rudely at the door. We did not like Hanko Fatime.

"It is a shame for little girls to watch the bride dress," she told us. We did not move. She had to shove us out by our arms. Sotira looked at us with sympathy, but her authority here was limited to giving Sister her bath and to stirring a preparation of lemon juice and sugar that was boiling over a coal brazier. However, we still managed to get a sight of what was going on through the keyhole, which was big enough to stick a finger through.

Hano was sitting motionless on a cushion. Her hands rested on her lap, her eyes were cast down. Her face was covered with a glassy coat of the lemon preparation, and now and then she jumped with pain when the serious Hanko Fatime pulled the gummy paste from her cheeks and forehead. She was pulling out tiny hairs so that Sister's face would be smooth as silk for the makeup that was to be her "wedding face." Time and again the young woman painted more gum on Hano's nose, her chin, and even inside her ears. Then she pulled it off with force;

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we could hear through the keyhole the "ksst" of the glaze coming off.

"Look, Sotira is crying," Ikbal whispered.

Yes, Sotira was wiping her cheeks and nose with the white sleeves of her blouse. "She cries because Hano is going away," I turned to explain to my friend.

"Eh, you are blind," Ikbal protested; "she cries because Hano's face is sore. Don't you see how red it is?"

I looked in again, but in the short time while Ikbal was moving over to give me a peep, Sister's face was red no longer. Her attendant was now spreading the whitening paste evenly over the bride's face. Next, she rouged a red triangle on each cheek. With a burnt almond she darkened her blonde eyebrows, and last of all she decorated her cheeks and forehead with a pine-tree design. It takes an expert to decorate the bride, especially to apply the tree decorations, which are made either with chopped tin-foil or with sequins. The trees are glued on tightly so that they will last many hours. Hanko Fatime knew her job, and would twitch her lips and nose as she proceeded.

With my face glued to the keyhole, I did not hear footsteps behind me. Suddenly a hand was pulling my ear. I turned in fright and saw my elder brother, Mehmet, looking down angrily at me. Twelve years old, his nose slightly like Cæsar's, he was proud of his approaching manhood and liked to show off his authority. As he

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was about to drag me away from the keyhole, I saw Mother entering the room through another door; stubbornly I kept my place.

Mother sat down beside Hano and began to whisper to her. I could not help admiring the new brown outfit she wore for the wedding; it made her look as beautiful as the bride. Although I was unable to hear her words to Sister, I learned in later years what the conversation was about. She was telling Hano what the word marriage meant and what the duties of a wife should be—reminding her that she was to step across her husband's threshold with a "tied tongue, one eye blind and one ear deaf."

"Nexho, hurry!" Ikbal pulled me by my sleeves, as if I was not wearing a silk dress. "The bride is coming out!"

"Fesh, fesh," the tail of the bridal dress swept the floor as Hano marched to the living room. The dress was pink silk, the choice made by the groom who gave it to her. On her forehead shone the silver tree; her red-stained cheeks blurred the glitter of the pine tree there, but nothing could affect her delicate beauty. At the foot of the living room, Hano took her place beside a chair. She stood as stiff as a plaster doll; long strings of silver foil, suspended from her hair, hung down both sides of her head. Her hair, usually blonde, was red now, for henna had been plastered on it the night before. Her hands rested on her stomach, one on top of the other. The

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pretty dress sleeves with their ruffles of ribbon and lace contrasted oddly with her fingerless evening gloves, imported from Paris.

"Look at the tip of your nose, hold up your head, don't let your knees shiver, and keep that in mind for the rest of the day," were Mother's final instructions as she sat by her daughter. She pretended to blow her nose and to clear her throat. But she was crying.

Crying began all over the room where wedding guests, all women, had begun to gather. As my father would have said, "A pot of winter beans could be boiled in the tears that flowed that day."

The young brides, meaning women married from one to ten years, were clad in red tcharchaffs; the older women in black. Very soon the room was crowded to overflowing. The guests squeezed together in rows along the walls, some sitting on couches and others cross-legged on the carpeted floor. Puffing away at cigarettes, the older ladies gossiped with each other. It would have been impolite to stare, of course; but the eyes of these old matrons, trained to catch the least mistake in manners, watched the younger ones critically.

The smell of lambs roasting over open fires in the courtyard let us know that the time to serve lunch had arrived. Young women in gay colors, their faces shining with white paste, a red circle on each cheek, moved in and out carrying provisions for the midday meal. They

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were chosen from the guests and were honored to be waiting at the bride's table. Many strings of napoleons decorated their white throats and bosoms, and chinked merrily with each step they took.

The wedding lunch was served at a large table which stood a foot from the floor. Since there was not room enough to seat all the guests at once, the table had to be set twice. At each serving, forty women with their children on their laps squeezed around it. As a hostess, Mother sat down with them both times, and had to force herself to eat. I sat beside her, getting up on my knees like all the others every time I had to dip my wooden spoon into the deep china bowl of chicken soup which had been placed in the center of the table as soon as we had found our places. Every guest dipped her spoon carefully into the bowl of steaming broth, which was coated with a half-inch of melted butter.

Sixteen courses are usually served at an Albanian wedding feast, although ours today did not have quite that many. There were enough, just the same. After the soup came the meat courses—meat balls made from lamb; okra stew; lamb with mint sauce, followed by the whole roasted lambs that had smelled so good roasting over the fires. Our guest waitresses brought the lambs on huge copper trays and set them before Mother to carve. The most coveted cuts, the heads and tails, were divided among the oldest women, an honor always re-

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served for them. Sour milk with chopped garlic was served after the rich roasted meats to settle their uneasy stomachs. For vegetables, we had stuffed squash, with a large bowl of sour milk served on the side.

There cannot be a wedding without a bride, but in my country not even the bride (who is left standing in her place while the feast goes on) is more important than the roasted lamb and kabuni. Kabuni is a dessert served next after the roast-meat course. To prepare it, rice is cooked in lamb broth, and to it is added a great deal of cut-up fried meat, sugar, raisins, fried almonds, spices, and much steaming butter that has been browned in the frying pan. Then another coat of powdered sugar over it completes the luxurious dish, kabuni.

No forks or knives are ever used on wedding tables: "They only cut the tongue and prick the mouth." We simply used wooden spoons and our fingers. But even with these crude means for getting food to our mouths, we had formal rules for eating. The younger women were careful to follow them. They crooked their little fingers just so, and picked up their food with thumbs and forefingers very daintily. The older ladies were enjoying the feast too much to bother about table etiquette. They used all five fingers to pull meat from the bones, and made a loud noise with their chewing, their cheeks sinking in and out of their poor toothless jaws.

As the meal was ending, the clatter of spoons and the

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laughing and talking grew louder. I was getting dizzy from the confusion, so I slipped quietly from my place to have my hands and face cleaned of the grease and crumbs. Without telling anyone where I was going, I disappeared for a while. I was going to have a little adventure.

IV

At the neighbor's, while the bride's celebration took place at our home, the men guests, mostly the husbands of the ladies who came, were having their festivities. In my country the sexes are never brought together at the same party. That may seem strange, especially for a wedding, but the custom has good reasons. In one place the young brides can forget themselves for a change, and laugh all they want. They are free of their seriousness and formality, so necessary when they are in the presence of men; weddings are for joy and frolic. Somewhere else the men are just as free and jolly. However, the host has to be careful that the house which the men occupy is some distance away, thus securing the peace among the men, for "Lord save the calamity" if a man discovers his friend looking at his wife in a yard close by, or on an open veranda, at such a time as this. The revolver, always ready on the right hip, may take care of the offender; his life may be the price for peeping.

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Father took care that nothing of this sort should happen during Hano's wedding. Nijazi Efendi's house was a good walk from ours. That was where I was bound when I stole away from the table. As I drew nearer, I could hear men laughing and shouting, and above the noise the frenzied music of the gypsy orchestra. Like kabuni, gypsies are a part of every wedding. They are engaged to provide the entertainment. Now the gay music made my feet want to dance. But I had to be quiet; a good beating would be waiting for me if I were found out. Carefully I crept to a window and looked in. The room was crowded with men, and dancing and singing among them were the gypsies. They were dancing the valle to a very fast tune; their shoulders were shaking as they twisted their slim waists so that their bright skirts flew out in clouds with every motion. The guests were drinking and applauding wildly. Here a man would catch the loose long hair of a pretty gypsy as she wheeled past him; there another guest, even a man to whom a penny is a lira, would open his bag to tip a dancer. He would wet the paper money first with his tongue, then paste it on her forehead. "Hopa!" he laughed. Someone else was shouting: "Weddings and whiskey! Omar Khayam, your lines are blessed!"

It was time for a toast, and the bottle made another round of the company. A guest whom I did not recognize lifted his glass to Father. "Per te mirè—a toast," he

shouted to the gathering. "Let the Lord provide as good a husband for the next one, Mustafa Efendi!"—meaning me.

All glasses were held high, and with a buzzing "Amen" the contents poured down their throats.

The groom was not among my father's guests. His celebration took place at his home in Valona. Three wedding parties thus were going on at the same time. Gani himself would not take part: he was required to sit quietly in his room with a friend or two to keep him company. Although he provided enough food and drink for his guests to feed a family several weeks, and although he paid for a band of gypsies with their instruments to amuse them, he himself, according to custom, was spending the day behind closed doors. Not until late in the afternoon did his hundred and fifty or so guests see him. Then the big ceremony began. He was taken out in the courtyard, where a barber with his implements waited to shave him. Around his chair, while the shaving was going on, the gypsies danced in a circle, joined by the riotous guests. At last the groom was permitted to get up and dress in his wedding outfit. All must be new, even the silk handkerchief which he put in his left coat pocket. Meanwhile the guests got themselves ready for the big procession to Krip to fetch the bride. Everyone, including the gypsies, was to go along, except Gani. He had to stay home. He would not see his bride until eleven o'clock that night.

When I returned to our house, after hearing the toast at the neighbor's, Hano was still standing in her place at the foot of the living room, which now buzzed with songs and laughter. Her eyes had gone almost crooked from looking at the tip of her nose as Mother had instructed her. Throughout the long hours of the afternoon, she was not permitted to relax once, nor to join in the jollity of the guests. Gypsies were entertaining them now. They were singing. Their songs made teasing references to the bride and groom and their relatives. Thus they improvised:

*Almond of the tree, girl of Mustafa,
Weep no more, O Dove! or your beauty will not last.
Then that vagabond, Gani, won't love you any more,
Nor that cat of a mother-in-law be glad to see you.*

Hano endured their jokes as if she did not mind them. As song followed song, she stood motionless as a candle. She said not a word, nor did she even notice me near by.

Finally, when it was about time for the wedding procession to arrive, Sister was allowed to sit down to have her meal. It was the first food she had had since her breakfast; a little dry rice was her share of all the feasting.

Suddenly a dozen voices shouted, "Here they come!" Hurriedly Father and his party were summoned, so that

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he might kiss his daughter farewell. And now he was here, and someone brought out the red bridal veil for him to drape over Hano's head; and around her trembling shoulders they threw the black silk tcharchaff, blotting out the bright pink of the wedding costume under its heavy folds.

Pushing and shoving at each other, the women guests ran to the windows and doors to watch the approaching procession, which appeared between the two hills in the distance. It looked like a battalion returning from a victory. Two red roans drew the bridal carriage, all covered in green and pink silks, the embroideries of gold sparkling in the afternoon sun. Slowly it moved toward us, bells tinkling at the horses' hooves as they kicked up dust from the sandy road. Chiffon handkerchiefs in red, yellow, and green fluttered from the horses' heads; flowers decorated their harness, and garlands of roses the carriage. Oh, it was a beautiful sight! Next followed the groom's party, some on horses, some on foot, firing revolvers in the air as they marched. The gypsy orchestra played furiously, the flute's note sounding above the other instruments.

At our gate the carriage stopped. Three women in tcharchaffs got out, and after them came Ismet, Gani's brother and emissary. As they came toward us, a roar of greetings went up from the crowds. Lost among the skirts and pantaloons of the women around me, I saw

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Hano kiss my parents good-bye, Father and Mother weeping. Hano's sobs could be heard above the din of voices. Everyone showered her with rice and candy as she was carried out in Ismet's arms. Sotira, stooping with sorrow and crying "ëyëy," trundled along with them.

In no time the house was deserted. When the bride left, every guest disappeared as if by magic. Our living room resembled a market place; rice and candy thrown over the bride's head lay on the floor, crushed by the multitude of feet.

A strange feeling pained my heart that night. My head pounded and tears rolled on the pillow where I lay shivering with cold. Mother came over to me, still thinking of her oldest child. Like a bird, Hanife was taken away from her nest. Gone to a new nest, strange hands and authority. Mother still wept for her.

Chapter II

THE SHEPHERD'S PIPE

As children we named our house in Krip the "Citadel of Ghenghis Khan," after an ancient legend we had heard, because it was so tall and stately and sat on a hillside overlooking the majestic sea. It rose like a white cliff in the center of our community, making the four other residences seem toy houses beside it. In these houses, which formed a half-circle together, lived the officials of the salt industry. We shared our half of the building with the director, Mürat Efendi, and his family, living in separate rooms; the other half was used for offices where buyers of salt passed to and fro, day after day, year after year, many coming from far countries to buy our fine product. The foreign trade it attracted brought much-needed gold to poverty-stricken Albania.

Large and modern though it appears to strangers, the house, which still stands, is very old indeed. A hundred years ago, when the Italians occupied the province extensively, an Italian warrior, it was said, had built the house for his sweetheart, an English nun whom he had captured in one of his campaigns. A wide balcony runs

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along the entire front of the house facing the Adriatic. Here only, we were told, the beautiful captive could promenade, at certain hours of the day. Even that long ago, the view she saw must have been as beautiful as it was to us when I was a little girl. My brother Hiqmet and I, who were very close companions although he was nine and I six, used to climb and twist on the balcony rails and feast our eyes far and near where nature had set a paradise. "Ours they are," we said; "land and the sea."

It was part of our daily fun to watch the large sailing ships go to and fro, carrying passengers and cargo between Valona, our seaport, and Italy. We knew that when there were signs of a storm coming, the ships would hurry into the harbor for shelter. Sometimes, when the storm was severe, a ship would run on to a sand bar and remain there for several days until another boat came to the rescue. Then at night we watched the twinkling lights flickering across the "Big Water," as we called the Adriatic.

This balcony that I speak of faces a wonderful view of the sea and the mountains. On the left rises Mount Kanina with the historic fortress on its crest; and the village embracing it below has been the scene of many famous wars since medieval times, when the Venetians, Byzantines, Serbs, and Turks fought to seize it. Today it stands there, a ruin of wars among stones and rocks. Here, in 1912, our hero Ismail Qemal raised the flag of

independence after Albania had been under Turkish rule for some four hundred years: a mausoleum stands over his grave. Below, olive groves cover the hillsides and touch the borders of Valona, our beautiful city of the South. Its white houses and red tile roofs, and its tall minarets rising high in the air, make Valona look, from a distance, like a young bride. Down the Southern coast the mountains string out, neither high nor lofty as in Northern Albania, but in a chain of ups and downs like so many bridges. The highest of these humps is Mount Karaburun, clad in its faint toga of gray. At the foot, villages, like cambric patches scattered here and there, break the monotony of ash color. Then comes the harbor of Valona which the Creator shaped so well; jagged mountains surrounding it form its edges and give it the appearance of a clam shell. It is the safest harbor in the country, and one of the prettiest anywhere in the world.

From the harbor the sea extends westward, its tail getting narrower and narrower (so it seems from our balcony) until it curls behind the Island of Sazan. Though small, this piece of land, rising from the waters like a tortoise, played a rôle in Albanian history. After our war for independence, it was given to the Italians and has belonged to them ever since. Its strategic position in the Adriatic makes it desirable to our neighbors.

On our extreme right, the mountain slopes are covered with fertile orchards of vines, figs, and peaches which

supply us with fruit. The orchards descend right to the shores of Lake Narta, which furnishes the salt industry at Krip with water rich in salt deposits. In deep channels the water is carried from the lake to Krip where, in vast square tubs of clay, it is preserved until the hot summer sun evaporates it and leaves tons of snow-white salt. Lake Narta lies on high ground, and just below it is the town of the same name, its houses with their whitewashed walls sitting in the salty mud on the edges of Krip. From Narta come the salt workers; its men are the only ones hearty enough to stand the strong, briny mud and the blinding rays of the sun (attracted by the salt itself) while working in bare feet ten hours a day. Its women also are known for their cleanliness, posture, and graceful walk, acquired by carrying jars of water—that is, drinking water; for Narta has but one sweet spring. Sotira, our house servant, came from this town.

Coming nearer our house, the scene is more farmland, with the fields of grain and maize spreading out in every direction. And then comes the park, where, like a green umbrella, forty-one elm trees rise together in one green mass. In evenings, this green dome turns gray from the thousands of birds that roost there. They come from all over the country-side, and are of many kinds. Before dark it is impossible for two people to hear one another talk, so loud is the chirping of the birds.

The Krip of my childhood was a paradise to my brother and me and our playmates; we thought it belonged to us. The Sahara of creamy sand and the Big Water, the birds, the sheep and goats, the flowers amid which we played—all these were ours. From Krip we never wished to part. The wild animals that came at night to our doors were our friends. We did not fear the wolf nor the jackal, for the striking of a match scared them away.

In winter the frozen birds, the wild ducks which we picked like flowers from the marshes along the sea, were our patients. Beside the brazier we warmed their breasts and fed them and washed their beaks and legs, and when they were well we let them go.

We had our pets, too. Hiqmet's was a donkey—Kachup was his name. He taught Kachup how to dance while he played the harmonica. The donkey raised his ears and tail—and two steps forward—one kick backward—his dancing steps kept perfect time. My pet, a cock, could dance too; but his specialty was to sing. He shook his head and twisted his long neck as he sang, "Ka, kakarakaka, kaaaa." Leçi, as I named him, never liked chickens. Nor did he like to stay outside except when riding on Kachup's back. He stayed in the house and cleared the room of flies. His bed was a roof tile, large enough to

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fit him. He had broken his leg when he was a baby chick, and Hiqmet and I had nursed him. Hiqmet, the "doctor," tied his leg with two match sticks and banded it with strings of hair which I saved up in a bag from the combings of my long braids. (My blonde hair was too long then for me to comb alone. Often I got headaches and spells of fever, when, so they told me, wicked-eyed women admired my braids too much, or touched them with their hands. To stop the hair from falling out, I weighted the ends of my braids with two bead flowers and two garlices wrapped in serpent's skin.)

But Krip, usually so calm and serene, was often attacked by heavy wind storms, working ruin and havoc in the community. From the Adriatic on the south, the wind came whistling with a moaning melody, sweeping before it seaweed, the sand hills, and the helpless birds that were caught in the air. The opposing north winds blew with less fury; but meeting their enemy, the south wind, they clashed together like thunder and the war began. Men were hurled to the streets like rags, if strangers to this experience. The winds blew the little birds to tatters; dozens were killed in a day.

Huddled indoors, with the windows and doors closed, —thick timbers holding the doors from tearing open,— we could hear the many nests of swans being blown suddenly away from the roof above us. We could hear the cry of the little ones, mingled with that moaning

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melody of the wind. One blow would die away, but only for another one to follow. Our houses shook as if about to be torn from the ground. These storms came five or six times yearly, leaving after them a ruin of homeless birds, splintered olive trees, houses without roofs, and broken window glass. Still, the "big wind" at Krip was part of our exciting childhood.

III

Among the six officials selected by the Albanian government to run the salt industry, then owned by my country, was my father, Mustafa Zaimi of Libohova. As comptroller, his job was to see how much salt was produced each day, how much sold, how much stored for the winter in the two-story-high pyramids, held down by tiles, that could be seen everywhere at Krip, the very name of which means "salt." Libohova, where both he and Mother came from, is a small town in Southern Albania, lying among dry stones. Father's home still stands in that part of Libohova known as Zaimat—therefore he has the name Zaimi. His full name then becomes Mustafa Zaimi of Libohova; for it is a custom that when a man leaves his native town, he shall carry its name wherever he goes. Proud is the village whose former citizens thus spread its name abroad.

His father once owned a lot of property; but like an

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unworthy Mohammedan, as he would be called by more devout relatives, he wasted his wealth in drinking and having a good time. He finally died of dissipation, leaving his young boy, Mustafa, the responsibility of supporting his large family. Besides working from twelve to fifteen hours a day, Father went to school, where he had to learn the Koran by heart. (In those days teachers were strict; if a pupil could not recite his lesson very well, he was punished severely—sometimes by a whipping on the soles of his feet, sometimes by being forced to kneel on sharp, broken tiles.)

Father's life winds with many adventures. Before meeting my mother, he had already been married and had divorced his first wife. For, when he was twenty-eight years old, Father had married a very pretty girl from his home town. A month after his wedding, he was suddenly sent away to Greece on business, leaving his bride at home—all alone but for an old woman who came there to eat and sleep. The new wife was a lonely soul in the big house, whose windows faced the street below.

Six months passed, and Father was still in Greece, where he was working as director of finance in Sajalla. One day an elderly cousin came to tell him that he must divorce his wife at once.

“But why?” asked the perplexed groom.

“Your bride has caused a scandal to our family. You have to divorce her immediately and restore your family

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reputation. Seven people have seen her talking from the window to strange men who pass by in the street." Half angry, and unwilling to believe his cousin's story, the groom wanted evidence.

"Who has seen her, for instance?"

"Why, Aunt Hafife herself. She hid behind the bushes by the road three times to make sure the rumor we had heard was true. And every time she caught the bride talking to the same man. And she saw her smiling at him, too." Still the groom could not believe what he heard.

"But this is impossible," he exclaimed, "for my bride comes from a very reputable family, where no such scandal has ever happened."

"Anyhow, anyhow, my boy, your aunt demands that you send a divorce to your bride," answered the anxious old cousin. "Do not hesitate, for you can pick the best girl in town, Mustafa, my boy; who wouldn't give his girl to a high official like you?"

So, very reluctantly, Father had to write on a piece of plain paper, "I have divorced your daughter." This was carried to the bride's father by the same cousin, and together with it the sixteen napoleons which completed the divorce formalities. The poor bride was sent home to her parents, being first told that her mother was ill. When she got there she was very happy not to find her mother in any such condition, but in another hour her

happiness was over; they told her the news of her divorce.

My mother was the one from whom I learned all these things; and as I well remember, she finished the story with a sad voice: "She was the prettiest girl in our neighborhood, God save her soul." The bride, you see, died two years after Father divorced her, broken-hearted.

The same Aunt Hafife who had arranged (and finished) his first marriage, was also the matchmaker of the second—to Sherife Hajredin, my mother. Once more she went visiting home after home wherever there were girls of an age to marry, inquiring of one and the other for such a girl, the daughter of such a man, the niece of such an uncle. At last she chose the daughter of Mulla Hajredin. (Mulla is an honorary name for older people; we no longer use it.) Yes, she learned, Sherife beat six to twelve churns of milk every day—she cooked delicious pies—and after all, she was good looking.

Yes, Aunt Hafife observed, she was still young, sixteen years; with a slender face, to be sure, but with long brown hair. Her eyes were green (not so good), and she was slim (not good, either), but she did come from a good family of Libohova. Indeed, the Hajredins considered themselves superior to Father's people. They lived in the upper, mountainous part of the town, while Father's family lived in the lower; a more pleasant quarter than the other, but considered an inferior neighborhood. When I was a girl, Mother would remind him of it if a

sharp argument arose. Father always answered, "Perhaps so; but you should remember that your first child was a girl." (In Albania, boys are always preferred to girls; superstitious devices like eating a male hare's intestines, eating fresh onions, riding a donkey face to tail, and many other charms of this kind are supposed to be of help.)

Mother herself came from a large family of girls. She was the youngest of twelve daughters of a cattle proprietor, whose greatest sorrow in life was that he had only one son. After she married Father, they went directly to Greece and there they stayed for ten years, traveling from one city to another as Father's work demanded. A girl, a boy, another boy and a girl were born during these years, I being the fourth—the "pilaf scorch" (meaning scorched rice, the bottom of the pot), as Father would say. Perhaps I may add, though, that the "scorch" is very much liked at home. I was born in 1915.

It was the year 1916 when the family reached Valona. My people had gone through the fears and sufferings of the Greek revolution before leaving Greece. It was the time when Prince Wilhelm of Wied, called "Vidi" by us, son of the Kaiser of Germany, was brought to Albania to organize the shattered little nation which had undergone persecution, slavery and disorder for hundreds of years. Prince "Vidi" * lasted only six months, for the

* *"Veni, vidi, vici."*

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blood of the Albanians had not yet cooled off. They were wild; their coming into a world of freedom made them blind to anything resembling law and order.

Vlora, which is known as Valona to foreigners, received us. Here we landed with what there was left of our clothes and furniture, happy to be under a shelter where peace reigned at least for a time. Since I was only two then, I do not remember anything of our arrival; so that my first recollections occur in Krip, when I must have been three or four years old.

IV

Whenever I drink beer, the "ffshsh—ing" sound of it, and the foam spreading over my lips and touching the tip of my nose, remind me of the milk Sadik, the shepherd, would give us when milking his goats and sheep.

We children of Krip knew the exact time when Sadik would be driving his flock home from the pastures, and every evening we would watch for him. The sun touched the mountain on the west—that tall Mount Karaburun. A melody of sadness, the sound of a flute echoed from the hills above Krip. It sounded nearer and nearer, until Sadik himself appeared over the top. His flock, moving in a solid mass, seemed like a wave of white lava moving slowly before him down the green hillsides. His flute

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twinkled in the rays of the setting sun. Sweet was its melody.

Sadik owned no watch nor did he wish to own one. He knew the half and quarter parts of the hour with just a look at the sun. So when the sun indicated six o'clock, Sadik had reached his hut and was shouting "how, how" to his sheep and goats so clearly that we children could hear him though we were down in the valley, a good foot-race distance away.

"Hi, let's go. Sadik has come!"

Hiqmet, my brother, gathered us together at the edge of the field where we were playing. There were five of us: my friend Ikbal and I, six, the youngest; Merushe, Sadik's youngest daughter, ten; and Surja, Ikbal's brother, also ten. Hiqmet was our leader, and was giving the signals for our run to the hilltop and to Sadik's milk pail.

"Wait! One, two! Two, three!" With "three" our daily race began. Merushe, running swiftly on bare feet, made us "city" young ones realize that our shoes were only dungeons to jail our toes. So, halting for a moment, we swiftly took them off—and the stockings too—so we might run the faster. Down the open fields we chased; Hiqmet, as always, far out front, his white shirt-tails flying in the breeze. Some distance along, Kachup, the donkey, who had been browsing in the grass near by, spied Hiqmet and along he came, too. His kicking hoofs

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thumped on the soft ground with a jerky rhythm, as if beating time for our feet to follow. Thorns pricking our feet often compelled us to stop and pull them out. Over the hill we dashed to reach the goal. Oh, how dry our throats were! The milk would taste so good.

Hiqmet, the winner of the race, ran to Sadik and touched him on the back. That was the rule for winning the first dipperful of milk. We four other children were not far behind, and soon saw Sadik, a stooping figure of sixty years, already at the evening's milking. His leathery old face turned smiling in our direction, for he had been expecting the "five hares." Milling about in the fold, which was an enclosure of woven sticks near his hut, his flock were expecting us, too. The sheep liked us. Our fuss and chatter did not disturb them. With gentle eyes they looked at us and curved their backs when we petted them. Sheep are not stupid, as people say. Of their own accord, they walked one by one before the shepherd to be milked in turn. They opened their hind legs over the tin milk pail without a word of command. As Sadik, behind the pail, sat milking, his large fingers, stained green and cracked from work, squeezed the udders in rhythmic time. Gushing with foam, the pail filled up. We thought the milk was whiter than any milk, yet almost pink. And it smelled so good, too; a smell Sadik carried with him wherever he went. How our mouths watered for the first drink! In Sadik dipped the tin cup. His hand sank deep

into the foam and came up dripping as he handed it to us. Oh, it was a tonic to calm our hearts, still pounding from the race, and the "kur-kuring" of our empty stomachs.

We never thanked Sadik with words, yet he knew that our hearts did so. While we sat around him on the ground, stroking his coarse woolen coat (woven by Zeliha, his wife, from goats' hair), he smiled gently and entertained us with his sweet conversation; as sweet as his milk.

"Sadiko, Lhaj Xaxi is coming tomorrow," Hiqmet reminded him when the milking was done and the flock had been shut up in the fold for the night.

"Ow, ehë!" the shepherd nodded understandingly. "Tomorrow is market day. You won't come for qumesht (milk). Very well, I know you like those Sarakaçans more; their songs are better than my flute, hë, rabbits?" The Sarakaçans were our friends, the salt-buyers, from Korcha.

"No, no Sadiko. We like you more," I protested.

And that was very true. Homely as he surely was, we thought him handsome because he treated us so well. Though Sadik's left ear was not there, it did not mar his dear face. The right ear was big enough to be two. It looked like a lettuce leaf jutting out on one side of his head. His eyebrows were bushy; so long that they hid half of his hollow eyes. His thimble-shaped fez, almost

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ten inches high, once white, now looked brown, and so greasy that it could be fried.

There are many shepherds in Albania, for sheep raising is the chief occupation of my country, with farming second. The flocks that they tend sometimes belong to them, as did Sadik's; or, as is more likely, they belong to wealthy land proprietors or agas, on whose estates they live. In the fall season, before storms and snowfalls from the North make it impossible to travel, these shepherds wind their way through mountains and torrents to bring their flocks to the western regions of Valona, to the level plains where the winters are milder and snowfalls light. Thus they settle for the winter in the valleys of the South, where the animals are less likely to starve. Here they build thorn tents for the sheep, or straw shelters if they can afford it, while their own huts, built close beside them, are kept warm by the sheep's manure. Wolves are an ever-present danger; at night whole packs of them may suddenly come out of the forests, wild with hunger. Thus, partly from the beasts, but more often from cold and hunger and disease, the shepherds, by the end of the season, lose half or more of their only possession or means of support.

While they are known for their rugged character and bravery, we praise them for their extremely kind hearts and good humor. Hospitality is another virtue for which

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they are praised; their food is always free to any stranger who passes by, day or night. Their doors are always open to any who ask shelter.

A visitor to my country can distinguish them from other people by the clothes they wear. They dress in heavy woolen clothes which their women spin and weave on looms constructed by themselves. Their trousers are either white or black, depending upon the province they come from. Some shepherds wear gray woolen vests, as Sadik did, or else white ones embroidered with black thread, or black ones embroidered in white. The armpits of their white cotton shirts are left open to allow the air to come in; the sleeves are wide and full, useful either as a handkerchief or a napkin. A very wide woolen cloak, either white or gay in color, which is surely half an inch thick, is their winter protection against cold rains and snowfalls. Their quaint high fezes keep the tops of their heads warm; no shepherd's fez is ever removed, either day or night, unless it is a hot day or the fez falls off unintentionally when its wearer goes to sleep.

For cold winter days, what could be better for the feet than their woolen stockings, which are always slit at the heel?—a discovery of the wise village women who found that stockings knitted open at the heels wear three times as long as others. The slit is placed just where the shoes rub the hardest. If a shepherd can afford them, he wears heavy leather shoes. Otherwise, he makes his own shoes

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out of goat skin cut in the shape of a clam shell and tied with leather thongs around his ankles.

Sadik had come to Krip four years before my story opens. His home and vast property were once in the far eastern part of Albania, until the wars of the year 1912 drove him to nowhere, leaving behind his town swallowed in flames. As a wanderer to the South, at last Sadik found a piece of land which he could call "home." The officials of Krip allowed him to rear his hut and pasture his flocks within the boundary of the community. Once more Sadik was happy. He and his family had a home, and his sheep could graze in the valleys of Krip, where the grass was the richest. The salt in the ground gave a special taste to the grass; this was the reason, I suppose, that Sadik's milk was the best in the world!

An incident which makes his name immortal in my family happened on his first visit to our home. Bajram, as we call our Easter, is the festival when young and old go visiting not only their friends but wherever an open gate attracts them. Sadik did not know the customs of the South, and when he thought of calling at our house to congratulate Father on Easter Day, he asked the head guard of Krip to acquaint him with the necessary etiquette.

"Let us go together this afternoon," Xha Xhemo suggested. "All you have to do is watch what I do, and then do the same." Sadik thanked him and said he would try

his best. That high threshold of the guest room was to blame for what happened. Xha Xhemo, an old man himself, was just about to step into the room when his left foot caught on the outside of the board. He stumbled forward, raised his arms outward, naturally enough, to get a hold on something, and soon regained his posture. But Sadik, whose old eyes were keen, observed this action carefully and thought this must be "act one of custom formalities"; he was quick to notice the perfect, though accidental, pose of Xha Xhemo. He also bent down his head as his leader had done, raised his arms forward and curled his fingers; nothing had escaped him. Then he struck his foot (the left one, of course!) in the same place where the guard had stumbled, and dashed headlong forward. He was about to fall face down—but no, his friend did not fall. Quickly he straightened up, and, touching his forehead with the tips of his fingers, saluted seriously: "Tungjatjeta—long life to you!" No one present even smiled. . . .

"What smells so good Sadiko?" I sniffed the air that was filled with the smell of baking. We were still lingering at the doorstep of his straw hut.

"Wife, oi Wife," the shepherd instantly called, knowing what we children were waiting for. "Bring out some of that corn bread." The door of the hut opened and Zeliha came out holding a half-loaf of steaming bread.

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It looked yellow and bright, in contrast to her faded outfit. A tight vest and wide pantaloons falling in folds to her ankles was what she wore, yet the patches were too many to let one judge what the original robe had been.

Dividing her offering among us, she spoke in a feeble voice:

“Oh, here you are, you flowers of my heart.”

How greedily we munched the warm, sweet bread!

Strange! The scene comes back to me. It was sunset, all was calm and pleasant; but, first of all, our stomachs were satisfied. Sadik, his work done for the day, drew out his flute from his belt. With eyes half-closed, his head resting against the hut, “his home,” he played for us—a melody sweet and serene. Sad were his songs, many of which we knew.

From the east—the west—all around the hills, other flutes were heard from other shepherds’ huts, which dotted the hillsides like so many little cones. Their day’s labors over, evening for them meant songs and music.

“Ou, Hiqme-e-e-et; Ou, Ne-e-e-exhmo! Come to supper!”

Brother Mehmet’s loud call broke in upon us, sitting there so peaceful, with our hearts so happy and still. We had to go home.

"Wash your lips and hands before you go near your father," Mother's orders came from the kitchen where she was cooking supper when we dashed into the yard that evening. "And don't go into the room, for he is not through with the evening prayer."

"I don't know why the Lord orders people to eat supper," Hiqmet complained, holding his full stomach with his right hand, as dutifully we marched over to the faucet that stood in the corner of the courtyard. "Or to be washed so often," added I, though I knew that to skip the evening washing would arouse Father to say we "smelled Sadik."

Sotira, patient, gentle Sotira, bathed our hot faces and with her thick fingers smoothed our hair, murmuring an affectionate word or two as she accompanied us to the house and stood with us outside the door until Father had finished his prayers. My father was always a fanatic Believer, although, through his travels, he had come in touch with modern ideas that treat the Koran with disrespect. The rules that were written in the Holy Book were used by him on every occasion, and when we broke them it was like breaking his happiness.

At last the doors were opened. They had been closed because Father wanted to keep out stray cats while he

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was praying; for no living thing must walk before a person who prays. With straight faces we filed into the room, poking each other silently until we reached the table. Father, without noticing us, already sat at his place at the head. He was fingering the long string of beads which every Mohammedan counts at sunset, the time of prayer. The tiger skin he used for prayers still lay on the floor, facing Mecca. It was folded double so that no human foot would step on the right side; but Father, who believed in letting his wife serve him in everything, had left it for Mother to pick up.

Having lighted the kerosene lamps which hung against the walls, and placed our supper on the table, Mother came in, and we all took our places. Meto sat on Father's right, proud to be second man in the family; I, on Father's left; and Hiqmet, the favorite child, next to Mother. When I say "table" I mean what we call a sofra, for it has no long legs as if it were a swan, our idea of modern tables; and we do not mistreat our legs, to hang them under the table while we eat, nor at other times when we can avoid it. Our sofra, made of cherry,—just the plain scrubbed wood,—was as round as the face of the sun and eight fingers from the floor, just high enough to stick our knees under as we sat cross-legged.

The food set before us seemed so good; the stuffed eggplants with fried onion, garlic, and tomatoes thick with

olive oil was our favorite dish. Tonight, though, only our noses, Hiqmet's and mine, appreciated the flavor. We always had a bowl of freshly made sour milk on our table which we ate plain. A copper dish full of olives and lumps of cheese completed our supper. Though my family used forks when there were just ourselves at the table, they were an unusual luxury. A fork seemed so heavy in my childish hands, but I tried to hold it tight and be sure not to drop it. Before beginning to eat, Father said "Bismilahi Rahmani Rahim"; each of us repeated the prayer silently. Then we could eat.

During the meal little talking was permitted. To laugh meant abusing the laws, nor were we allowed to lean against anything or carry bread to the mouth with the left hand.

"Do not put the bread upside down, for it is a sin; do not place the spoon downwards; do not add water to the glass when it is half full; do not drink water while you eat hot food, for you will have no teeth." Such laws were repeatedly mentioned by our parents; they were the orders of the Holy Book, which we understood to mean it was sinful to break them. But today I realize that they were all rules of health and good manners.

"I don't know what to do with these two children," Mother complained to Father. "They go and eat Sadik's bread as if they don't have any at home."

"The neighbor's chicken has more suet," Father an-

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swered, quoting the proverb while lighting up his cigarette.

"And they drink Sadik's milk where he sticks his hand and even his sleeves," giggled Meto.

"It is none of your bus . . ." Hiqmet began to say "business" but stopped in time, catching Father's look just then.

"Go and get to bed quickly," ordered Father; "I will have enough noise and fights tomorrow among that flock of Sarakaçans."

Troop, troop, Hiqmet and I walked out and closed the door behind us softly, and marched down the long hall that went to our sleeping room. But our tired feet zigzagged along the eleven-meter passageway. All of us children slept in the same room; three of us, now that Hano had gone to live with her husband.

The room was large and square, with high walls, white in color; and the ceiling was carved and painted in blue, yellow, and red. In the middle of the ceiling, painted in gold and orange, was a seven-days-old moon, surrounded by stars—forty-three in number. The design may have been beautiful, but not to Brother and me; it was the emblem of the Turkish flag, a flag we had learned to hate. Young as we were, we were loyal little "Shqipetare"—Albanians.

Only one picture, of our hero Ismail Qemal, hung on our walls, which were broken by two large French win-

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dows, one on the south wall and one on the west. On the floor of the bedroom lay our mattresses, side by side. (Hano's was now folded on a trunk, by itself.) Against one wall three large chests stood in a row, piled high with mattresses; and stored away in them were the silk quilts and pillows Mother put aside for guests. A grass-colored spread, bearing a design of a bride dancing as a gypsy orchestra played for her, with the groom sitting on a couch close by, covered the chests and mattresses.

When taking off our clothes, Brother and I were very reserved, though we never so much as heard of screens. In our bedroom we did not feel the need of them; not so long as this barricade of chests provided a means for privacy. There we stood, one at each end of the row, preparing to go to bed. I was struggling while taking off my day-clothes.

“Nexho, Nexh!” Hiqmet called from the other end of the chests; “tomorrow we have to watch the furniture, remember?”

Standing in my bare feet, I struggled with my underwear. It would not come off. The cambric petticoat was still new and starchy; the buttons would not slide from their holes. Free from it at last, “Uffff . . . why tomorrow?” I groaned in answer to Hiqmet’s sad reminder. “Why would it have to come on market day?”

Hiqmet, as he did every night, waited in his place

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until I had finished. Then he joined me, and together we crawled under the mosquito net that covered our two mattresses. Side by side, we crept under the covers and, holding each other's hands, we dozed off to sleep.

Chapter III

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“QUICK, Nexho; Master Hiqmet, quick! Go out and watch the furniture,” Sotira ordered the next morning, right after we had dressed.

“Ou, what is this?” Hiqmet asked sleepily. “We have not yet yawned our sleep off.”

“The Big Mistress orders you to go out and watch the furniture.”

“Ou, Sotira, our stomachs are hollow,” I complained.

“Quick, quick!” She shoved us toward the door. “I will bring your breakfast out, if you watch the things.”

“What do you think we are? Shepherds?” Brother protested.

While we were arguing, Mother came running in from the street. She was holding up the bottom of her skirt to permit her to move quickly. Around her head she wore a jashmak just like Sotira’s.

“Mana! Sotira is pushing us out,” I said, running to her.

“Yes, ehë, I told her to. Do as she says!” and Mother

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hurried past us to the guest room where she gathered up an armful of things. There was nothing else for us to do but obey. But, by Allah, we did not want to waste a precious, bright morning guarding furniture.

Outside in the street we bumped into piles of it, massed higher than our heads. The whole household had been turned inside out; mattresses, chairs, tables, rugs, pots, even frying pans, dragged into the street by Mother and Sotira. It was the big cleaning day, the "house-shaking of the season," as housewives in Albania call it. Not a thing was left in the house, for the rooms were to be whitewashed, the floors scrubbed, the windows washed, the copper dishes polished. And last of all, Sotira was to scrub her foot soles with a piece of sunbaked tile, as soap alone would not get out the dirt ground into them from walking barefooted. From twenty to thirty gallons of water would be used for the cleaning, every drop pulled from a well by the helpful guards.

On these days both mistress and servant get up before daylight to begin the "house-shaking," while the rest are left to sleep. By late morning, however, out all must go, along with the furniture; the Albanian housewife will have her way in this. Yet, while Mother rolled up her sleeves to help Sotira, her relations with the servant were always formal. And as always, Sotira, like all her kind, was a faithful, hard-working soul, accepting her position without complaint. From early morning to late at night

she would toil, receiving about three to four dollars a month as wages. She gathered kindling for the fires, kept house, washed all laundry, churned from twelve to fifteen pounds of butter daily, made cheese, and did much more besides.

Not very happy, Hiqmet and I took our posts by the furniture and began planning our escape. Up and down the street as far as we could see other barricades of household goods were lined, leaving barely room for people to pass.

"Out, out, I say—and stay out," came the voice of Makbule Hanem, the treasurer's wife, from the next house. She was Ikbal's mother.

"Ou, what is this?" said Brother, who was in a mischievous mood now. Ikbal came out, jumping and kicking happily, and joined us.

Wondering what to do next, we stood there looking at our houses of Krip, at our homes being "shaken." Everywhere the doors stood wide open, showing the stripped rooms inside; the windows were taken off their hinges to be cleaned. Housewives hustled back and forth through the rooms, unaware that many strangers passing in the streets stopped to watch this curious scene, and the women, too. Fortunately the husbands were busy at their offices! As the women hurried in and out, still dragging things to the street, they stretched their necks to look at other houses, wondering who of their neighbors was mak-

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ing the most progress. From too much hurry, their nervous hands dropped the copper dishes and tin cans; luckily they could not break.

A heavy "boom" sounded in the direction of Ikbal's house. Someone had taken a fall.

"Oh, that was Mother scrubbing the floor," my playmate spoke in fear, for she knew it was her mother's heavy body that had caused the thud. Housewives in Albania scrub their floors with screen wire wrapped in a rag, which their bare feet push about with gliding motions. It is easy for one to slip suddenly so that the feet go out from under and one falls down like a sack of salt.

Wide-open doors attracted the chickens of the neighborhood. They would wander inside to explore, but only to come out flying wildly through windows and doors. The more courageous cocks returned, but were again chased by the angry cleaners. "Kaaaa-ka-ka-ka-ka," they cried in fright.

"Oy, Oy, Hiqmet!"

We three raised our heads to see old Xha Xhemo, the guard, standing on the office balcony just above us.

"The Sarakaçans are coming," he whispered to us, knowing that our parents did not approve of our acquaintance with these men; so often we caught fleas from them. Xha Xhemo's hint was all we needed to make us desert our places at the furniture piles. Away we ran toward the road leading in from Valona.

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"The Sara-Sara-ka-ka-çans are coming," we three sang as we ran.

II

Down the sandy road that ran amid the fields of maize, the cavalcade of horses was galloping. There were forty of them, in double file. They filled us with excitement. Their tramping hooves sounded above the shouting of their masters, and jingling bells rang out melodiously. Breathless we continued to run. With arms raised, the Sarakaçans hailed us and slowed down their horses, prancing and kicking, as they reached us. Like armed cavalry these big men rode. They seemed like giants to us, standing on the ground beside them. At their horses' necks hung bells in the shape of the Pope's skullcap, and just as large. Master and horse blended together as if they were one; both were brown, almost a coffee color. The skins of the Sarakaçans were brown; their shaggy clothing was also; and velvety brown were the glossy coats of the horses. Without wasting any words, we were lifted into the large wooden saddles, made strong to hold heavy salt sacks. First I, then Ikbal, then Hiqmet were picked up for the ride back to Krip, each of us sitting on a Sarakaçan's lap.

Oh, it was a joy to hop up and down with the horse's galloping, though the trousers of goat's wool beneath our

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legs pricked like thistles. These big men could not realize the sensitiveness of our skins because theirs, bronzed and toughened from the weather, could probably stand even the shots of a machine gun, so we thought.

Before the field where the salt depot stood, the horses came to a stop. Dripping with sweat, they seemed grateful that their long journey from Korcha was ended. They had traveled nine days and nights to reach Krip. They would go back that same day, laden with heavy salt sacks woven from tough threads. About five or six times a year the Sarakaçans traveled from Korcha, a prosperous city near the Greek border, to buy Krip salt, and then traveled back again to market it or export it to nearby countries like Rumania and Yugoslavia.

Now we were being handed down from our high seats by the great arms of the Sarakaçans, and with a polite "long life to you," we made as if to leave the men.

"Stay with us and sing," Lhaj Xaxi invited us kindly. Lhaj Xaxi was their leader and our favorite. That was not his real name. We children teased him with it, because we liked the sound. The language of the Sarakaçans sounded so queer to us; all we could catch in their conversations was "lhaj" and "xaxi," so we put the two sounds together. Our big friends did not mind being teased in this way. No sooner had Xaxi invited us to stay than we sat down on the ground and crossed our legs. We watched the men hang bags of corn on every horse's

head. Then they took their own bags of food off the saddles, and close by the animals they all sat down to eat.

A faint gray mist rose from the salt fields near by, as always happened when the day was very hot. The horses dripping sweat proved it, too—but the Sarakaçans even more. On their leathery foreheads and cheeks, so ruddy you could almost see the blood buzzing underneath the skin, streams rolled down, then drip-dripped on their coats. There the thick wool sucked it in. From skin to top-coat their clothing was seven fingers thick, at least; one thing on top of the other. Yet these big men, tall and wide, were not bothered by the heat. They did not choose a shady place to eat their lunches, but the bare ground where the sun stood above their heads.

They stretched, took off their fezes, and opened their bags of lunch. Thick woolen leggings, dark brown in color, covered their legs, and thick leather shoes, with hobnailed soles and toe-tips pointed up, jutted out in front of them. We sat in the center of the ring near Lhaj Xaxi. It was the place of honor. Spread open before each lap was a leather bag filled with olives, Albanian cheese, and huge pieces of corn bread. There was a small watermelon for each man, and an enamel jug of water stood by his side. With admiring glances we watched Xaxi stuff his vast cheeks with big pieces of corn bread, a lump of cheese, an olive or two, and then a bite of watermelon to wash the combination down. Like monkeys we tried

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to do the same. Although the corn bread was hard enough to stop a bullet, I do not remember that we ever got a stomach ache.

“Little pigeons, eat more bread!” Xaxi shoved lumps of it before us, his beetle-black eyes glittering from the sun. His dark hair, coarse and wet, stood like a cap on his head. One of his friends must have given him a haircut on the way—with a penknife, by the look of it. Now and then he wiped his mouth with his rough sleeves.

“Eat, *ori* pigeons,” he urged us again and again, though we had already eaten more than our stomachs could hold.

“Lhaj Xaxi, where is the hip of that horse?” asked Hiqmet, his mouth full. He was pointing at one of the animals whose right hip was not there.

“The wolves ate it, my son,” Xaxi answered. “We had a bad time with the *ujq* on this journey. The forests were full of them; we could not fight them off.” The poor horse was kicking to chase the flies away, but the flies always came back to the wound.

These Sarakaçans are a hardy race of Slavic blood, though for many years now their tribes have lived in Albania. Another of their names for themselves is “Vllah.” They are Christians and speak Rumanian. With their hard-bred wives and their children, they wander in tribes from one town to the other, moving their cattle and households with them. They live very simply. Their homes are temporary straw huts, and the only furniture

they possess is a few rugs, a pillow for each, and a few pans. They have only one set of clothes besides what they have on their backs. They dress the same winter and summer, and the outfit consists of the same number of garments for each, all of the same color and same cut. They are very superstitious and very reserved with people outside their own tribes. Among themselves they talk and chatter constantly; they quarrel a lot but only with words. However, one who doesn't know their language cannot tell whether they are quarreling or just talking.

In the last ten or fifteen years, though, the Sarakaçans have proved to be very capable men. Some tribes of them, leaving their nomadic life to become modern citizens, have moved toward Tirana, the capital. Many of their number have held distinguished positions in Albania. They seem to possess special talent for the management of important undertakings.

But I should not forget to mention here that, when out of his woolen tribal costume, the Sarakaçan no longer looks like a giant as he did to us children. Once his hair is cut at the barber shop and he wears a suit cut after the fashion of the West, that large figure of a man melts down to normal size. Today this gentleman can be seen walking down Boulevard Zog, the main street of Tirana, where government and other officials like to parade every day; but no one can recognize him as a "Vllah." Twirling a cane with his monogram stenciled in gold on it, he

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swings his shoulders with affectation. This prosperous young man ignores his race and blood; he no more favors the Rumanians. His positive assertion to everyone is: "I am Shqipetar—Albanian."

III

As usual after the "big house-shaking" was done, the six officials of Krip announced, with much grumbling about being "turned out of their homes like chickens," that they would go to Valona for supper and would be back later in the evening. It is the man, said they, who works for a living in this world; and, to live, his body needs food. He can't live on grass and white water, just because his wife wants to play by shaking the house from the roots and is too tired afterward to cook him a decent dinner. His stomach needs power; he has to have a cooked dish of meat and grease . . . what we called a "blessed meal." And so it was that the wives and children ate supper without them. To us children, it was a special treat to eat out in the courtyard among the furniture, now heaped up inside our walls instead of in the street; with the smell of fresh whitewash and damp wood filling our noses. Our manners were none too careful as we helped ourselves to pickles, eggs, cheese, and grass salad; for our fathers were not there to scold us. Our mothers were too weary to trouble themselves with us. They did not

once refer to our visit with the Sarakaçans, or bother to look for fleas in our clothing.

Watching Mother's uncomplaining ways, I knew well, even then, that the man considers himself the hard worker of the family. He is the only one entitled to worry; he the only one to bear troubles. See the battalion of a family he must feed! Then why cannot he take a little care of himself as the monarch of his brood? At least the Lord God created him with this privilege. Such would be his words when speaking of his right and the place of his wife in this world.

"Eh, but we are men," he would say; "the star of privilege is right here on our foreheads before we are born. With women, it cannot be the same. Women's brains are put there only to feed their braids."

In truth, the officials' duties at Krip were not so hard. Ikbal's mother used to say of her husband that he was to be pitied, "sitting day after day on a comfortable chair in the office, drawing chickens' feet on the pad, while holding a cigarette in the other hand." Our fathers were not as strict in their homes as are most Albanian husbands, yet that strain of arrogance was there in their blood.

IV

It was the habit of the families of Krip to spend their evenings out on the lawn that spread like a velvet cloak

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in front of the residences. Men, women, and children would gather there around a big fire to roast corn and talk. Ever since our mothers had come out here an hour ago, having finished giving us our suppers, they had been lying in easy positions on straw mats, waiting for their husbands to come home. Cushions and shiltes were spread a few feet away where the men would rest. The feet of the tired women were hidden under their wide skirts—all but Makbule Hanem's. She always had to stretch her thick legs as if she were a man.

It would soon be dark. The air was cool, and all was quiet around us except the chirping of insects and the turtles gurgling in their mud beds down in the marshes. Mother, looking worn from her day's toiling, began to doze gently. The five other ladies did the same. Brother and I, with Ikbal and Merushe, the shepherd's daughter who sometimes came to our house to play, were silently "keeping house" a few steps away. The other children were scattered here and there. We could stay up late tonight, for the houses were still too damp for the sleeping mattresses to be brought into.

Another hour passed away. The gray of dusk melted into nightfall. Fireflies twinkling everywhere seemed to be imitating the lighted lanterns which the guards were carrying on their evening rounds. The guards were looking for salt thieves who might be hiding in the dark.

The wheels of the wagon rattled wildly on the road-

way, making a terrible noise and bringing the group on the lawn to life. Our fathers, like faithful husbands, were coming home again. A short distance from where we were sitting, Pilo, the coachman, with a grin all over his chubby round face, which he seldom shaved, pulled in the horse's reins. He gave a comical leap from his seat and soon was helping the six gentlemen out of the snow-white wagon.

"Hè! they must have had something to drink," whispered Nedime Hanem, wife of the director, to her companions. She was the first to notice that the officials all looked a little unsteady on their feet as they approached the circle. Their fezes sat at crooked angles on their heads, and they seemed very cheerful now and full of talk.

"Long life to you, mistresses!" they hailed the women all at once.

"Good evening, masters," answered the women together. They stood up when the men came, with their hands resting over their stomachs, one hand over the other, as the custom of politeness and formality demands —our ancestors having believed that the heart was near the diaphragm, instead of at the left side.

While the men were taking their places, their wives sat down stiffly without another word, except for Makbule Hanem, who ran to her house to get coffee. Makbule loved the importance of being hostess this evening. Besides, it gave her something to do to drive away the drowsiness. Her companions had to keep awake as best

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they could. Some raised their eyebrows and ruffled their foreheads to hold the eyelids open. Mother tied and retied the strings of her headkerchief and looked up at the sixteen-day moon that was in the sky. The secretary's wife stuck her little finger in her right ear, moved it up and down so much that it shook her whole head; yet she was careful not to let the men catch her at it and say, "Where did Hamdi Efendi hunt up that sleepy turtle, by Allah?"

With their shoe soles toward their wives, the gentlemen lounged at ease while Makbule poured them some coffee. They made a group all to themselves, murmuring something the women could not hear. When they wanted to smoke they could reach easily into a glass bowl full of cigarettes already rolled for them by their wives, who waited patiently for a chance to join the conversation.

Ah! Here came Pilo with an armful of wood and sticks to build us a fire. We children dropped our playthings, now, to watch the flames creeping from stick to stick and bursting, "puff," into a beautiful blaze. Pilo was on his knees helping the fire along. Next to him stood a large basket full of fresh corn, and there were copper trays full of grapes and figs which the orchards of Krip so abundantly provided. As soon as Pilo had stirred up a good fire, Nijazi Efendi, jollier than the others, left his cushion and slid on the grass to the fireside, offering to roast the corn.

"Hi, morè! your trousers will tear," Makbule, his wife, called out to him.

All laughed as if it were a great joke, and this gave the ladies courage to speak.

"What is the news from Valona?" Mother now ventured to ask.

"Eh, nothing much," replied Father. Silence. "None that concerns you." Silence. "Well, someone stole the prefect's hat from the café and the police can't find it, and . . . Oh, it does not concern you!" Father finished impatiently, picking up another cigarette from the neat heap beside him.

Mother accepted his words without argument; before company no arguments are allowed. But she tried again to dig out what the men had been murmuring about ever since they had returned. So she said to the director:

"Are you going to Bari, Mürat Efendi?"

"Eh, no, Sherife Hanem," said the director politely. He was sitting on his shilte like the Grand Turk, with his legs apart. Indeed, he was a Turk, retained in his position by the Albanian government after other Turkish officials had been withdrawn, because he was very capable and much honored among our people.

"I may have to go to the frontier, instead," he continued, talking to Mother.

Now the conversation grew excited.

"What! It is true then that we are opening war with

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Italy?" ("So that is what kept the men so long in Vailona!" Mother must have been thinking.)

All began to speak at once. The women forgot about aching feet and fingers that pounded like watches from their day's work; they stormed their husbands with questions; why and what and how was it that Albania was to open war with Italy?

Nijazi Efendi, who looked like a golden statue beside the blazing fire, his curly moustaches of which he was proud glittering like threads of gold, interrupted the talk by throwing a roasted ear of corn to each, and saying as he did so: "What do you women know of war, that you get so excited? It seems," he went on—trying to amuse them and thus ease their fears—"It seems you did the house-shaking for the Italian soldiers to enjoy it." Father laughed and the rest did the same.

Makbule would not stop talking.

"Hè," she said, "I am glad that I haven't washed and shaken the mattresses, at least."

We children shivered a little to hear the talk about "war," but giggled in pleasure. We knew nothing of war, yet felt happy in our hearts, anticipating excitement. But now the moaning of a beast sounded from the swamps where the reeds rose like a forest, and shook us children where we sat bunched near our parents. The "Vvumm" of the Big Water made us tremble the more. Over our heads the bright path of a strong searchlight cut the dark-

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ness. It was from a projector on an Italian battleship, stationed in Valona harbor—searching the hills, so we were told at Krip, for Austrian spies who might have come on Albanian soil.

Everyone was now talking and laughing nervously. Makbule grew so excited that she laughed with her mouth open and forgot to cover it with her palm. So loud was her voice that her husband turned to her in surprise. We had all drawn nearer the fire to avoid the thick mist that was forming. A ring of worried heads glowed in the fire-light; but as for us children, we were munching the corn with satisfaction. The men continued to talk among themselves, smoking more and more cigarettes. All the faces had turned to gold from the rising flames of the fire.

I sat behind Mother, resting my chin on her shoulder and looking toward the director, who played with his watch chain. Father, beside him, sat more pensive, rubbing his neck idly. My eyes wandered from one person to another, then rested on the director's wife. Nedime Hanem looked so pretty, although her snow-white face was reddened by the blaze. Her beauty was the talk of all the women, and of the men who managed to get a glimpse of her, as on these occasions around the fire.

Yes, Nedime Hanem was very attractive, but I hope you will not picture her as a slender woman, as modern taste in looks desires; for slenderness is just the opposite

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of Albanian taste. Her beauty was often discussed because people wondered how this "old lady" of forty had retained that handsome stout figure of hers; and how could she keep so young, when the others of her age already were considered old women? Why, her face could be compared with a twenty-year-old girl's; no hollows existed in her cheeks; those creases that appear on the foreheads of women of forty could not be seen on hers. What gave her that youthful look, however, and that proper fullness of the face, was her white chin, hanging down in a triple curve. "Mashallah! she was like a ship sailing, and she had the chin of a dove," many said of her. Or, "She is like a mountain ram, her face white and full like a fifteen-day moon."

And I, too, was a little admirer of Nedime Hanem as she sat by my mother, so straight and proud. She looked to me like a doll. Her face was round, as the men had said, with that tender skin that always shone "fët"—like a jewel on a ring. Her nose was like a candle. She was as plump as if her husband had fed her on "kajmak"—boiled cream—and almonds, just as an Easter turkey is fed.

She pulled down the lace cuff of her sleeve as she sat with her eyes cast down—eyes black like September olives. Who would not admire her lips, small and thin as a needle? She seldom laughed, careful not to expose

her small teeth very much; her beautiful tiny teeth, white as pearls.

Nedime Hanem was the idol of my dreams. I dreamed that maybe some day I would look like her, fat with plump cheeks and a chin in three pleats. I would feel mine to see whether there were any folds growing there. "Uff, as if I don't know that there is none," I exclaimed to myself, but consoled my heart by saying, "Oh, I will look like her when I am a grown lady." Many times I prayed God for that when going to bed at night.

My first game in the morning was to pretend I was Nedime Hanem. I would grab a towel, an apron, or if nothing else was handy, a diaper from the neighbor's where it hung out to dry; and putting it over my head, down as far as the eyebrows, and neatly folding it under the chin, I arranged a jashmak as Nedime wore hers. Often a thorn served instead of a pin to hold it in place. Thus dressed to imitate her, I ran from one water puddle to another, satisfied that the reflection there looked like my idol. I ran back to get a better look in window glasses and lamp mirrors—all the time trying not to be seen, for Hiqmet teased me, saying I would never look like her, not as long as my eyes were white like a cat's. Actually, they are green, but called "white" by Albanians, who admire black or brown eyes. . . .

"You!" Father interrupted my dreaming; "take that

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child home. She is sleeping with her mouth full of corn. She will choke."

Father was wrong. I was not sleeping. I had only stuffed my cheeks with corn so that they would look big and round like Nedime Hanem's.

Chapter IV

"FIGHTING WE WERE BORN . . ."

"Ya vdekje, ya liri!"—"Freedom, or death with honor!" The words rang over all the earth of Albania. Aged men cried the words with eyes turned upwards as if their hearts, being a little more timid, pleaded to the Lord for mercy. Mothers, much bewildered at the sudden event and not knowing what was to come, wiped their tears with the tails of their headkerchiefs. "Ya vdekje, ya liri!" they, too, pronounced the words to each other, trying to drown out their fear and sorrow with cries of courage. Soldiers, Albanian soldiers,—something that we infants had never seen before,—marched the streets in many-colored troops. They wore no uniform, for beauty is never thought of while the rafters burn. The modern men wore their neatly pressed suits in tints of blue and gray and white and dull purple. The peasants and the villagers marched in their thick woolen outfits, unaware of the hot sizzling sun. They thought only of "Freedom, or death with honor"; and some clever head turned the words into a melody.

The song, the marching of the soldiers, the dramatic

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cries of daring men that the earth vibrated to, summoned all out of their homes; the able and young to join the horde, and the old to pray. “What are they doing, Baba?” I asked in anxiety, shaking my father’s clenched fist.

“Eh? They are calling for the army, for men to come and fight.” His reply was cold.

“With whom, Baba?”

“With the Ita-li-ans, and that is enough,” he said, annoyed at my asking; and he pulled me along by the hand at a pace that my legs could not keep up with. Father had taken me to Valona to visit Hanife, but, because of what was about to happen, I was being taken home to Krip the very same day. We stopped again as another flock of singing and noisy men—soldiers to be—walked by with a broken marching of feet. Their nailed shoe-soles scratched against the stony road. It added melody and power to the call for recruits, but to my ears the sound was annoying.

“Too much noise, Baba,” I exclaimed to my father.

“Make that complaint after a few days,” my father said, smiling with tight lips.

“What are they going to do, Baba?” again I questioned in sheer ignorance.

“Will you let me think, Nexho, I say!” ordered my baba; and this time my arm was shaken hard.

I could not understand why these jolly-faced men marched foolishly in the streets, just “calling for sol-

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diers." Not the faintest understanding did I have that these men, the men of my land where law and order had not yet come, were calling for their countrymen to come out of their homes and fight for their freedom.

Yet so it was. After the constant fighting and bloodshed of four hundred and fifty years of miserable misrule under the Turkish Sultanates, Albania had shaken free of Turkey in 1912. But hardly five years of so-called peace had elapsed before another strong nation—a closer neighbor, this time—was trying to make this land of ours her own. No sooner had the World War ended than Italy had begun to embark ever more and more families, soldiers and well-trained officers, "slaves,"* and engineers for Albania. Every Tuesday and Thursday the transports reached the port of Valona, cutting in eight hours across the Adriatic direct from the Italian peninsula.

For the boot-shaped peninsula of Italy desired a stepping-stone beside her. As the number of our self-invited visitors grew larger, there had begun a sudden construction of bridges, roads, and buildings around Valona. Not that my country's natural riches and great farmlands had called forth this invasion. No; Albania now had shrunken to twelve thousand square miles in territory. A small nation, rising strong and proud in

* Austrian prisoners of war, held by the Italians after the Armistice, to do forced labor at Krip.

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the mountains of the Balkans, its importance to the West was as the eyes on a man's face. It is this strategical position that has earned my little land the title, “Key of Nations.”

So now, in 1920, Italy announced that she would have the fine harbor of Valona ceded to her, and also that gigantic double-saddled camel, the Island of Sazan, rising off shore like a blue landmark in the desert of waters. And to resist the enemy with his modern weapons and ample food, the young and strong men of Albania were fighting with shotguns and bitter hope—and the cry, “Freedom, or death with honor!”

II

The song of “Ya vdekje, ya liri,” was imported into Krip without delay. For Hilmi, the treasurer's son, chanted the lines like a spring nightingale. The rest of us soon caught on to the simple melody, and joyfully we sang it from dawn to late evening. We added to it a jolly “tra-la-la-la-lom,” which we thought gave the ending a needed gay touch.

Oh, but to our innocent minds this sudden excitement was a joy; for something new had happened! We even listened with smiling faces to the shouts and the thunder that came roaring from the mountains of Valona.

It was early morning, the twenty-fourth day of Ramazan, the Fasting Month. The sun had just rolled

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above the eastern mountains, but we children had played our morning games and were returning home for the second breakfast, when there came from Valona a message sent by an Italian friend of our parents. He had long been stationed at Krip, where everyone had respected him; for his was a heart rare among the others of his kind. We children never knew his name; he lives in my recollection only as "The Honorable Engineer"—the name of grateful tribute that our parents paid him.

"All Vlora is in danger," his message ran; "the battle is advancing toward the mountains, northeastward, and Krip will be a dangerous place to stay longer. Go away, flee if you can, but leave Krip at once. I am trying to help you and will help more if I can." No signature underlined the letter, but the Italian messenger gave the rest of the information.

"Il Sig. Inginero di Krip," he told our fathers, upon presenting the letter to them, where they had gathered to read it.

Yes, it was the handwriting of The Honorable Engineer; and he was trying to save his friends in little Krip, where he had lived far longer than we had.

"Where is he?"—I forgot which father it was that asked the messenger.

"At the gendarmerie in Valona, with the rest of the captains," the man replied.

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“Is he a captain?” the director inquired.

“Yes, yes, Signore. He is a captain of many medals; he is a high Italian officer,” the message-bearer said proudly, for he was an Italian, too.

“A noble captain ought to have closed his letter, ‘Heh Allah yaraby,’ ” many hearts exclaimed as the group broke away.

“And now where do we go?” Father exclaimed, after he had narrated the letter to Mother. “What can we do? where can we hide this flock of a family? Oh, my property, my wealth that I built with the sweat of my fingertips! O Allah!” my father exclaimed in hysterics.

I looked at Hiqmet for comfort, but he, too, must have been wondering what the other officials were doing at the same moment. (We heard presently that Hamdi Efendi had wept in terror, but that Mürat Efendi, the director, had eaten a hearty meal—a cheer for the son of a peasant!)

“Mustafa Efendi, forget your wealth; think of living creatures first, for money feels no pain,” Ismet Efendi tried to console my father. His voice had an accusing tone.

“You would not know, for you never had wealth . . .” But Hano’s brother-in-law, the tall and lean Ismet Efendi, interrupted my father out of plain wilfulness.

“No, neither wealth nor health, and neither a wife

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nor family, so I am escaping to Bari and then to Rome, since I cannot fight."

From outside, brother Mehmet came running in half out of breath: "Baba, Baba, soldiers have come for you!"

All stood aghast, for neither my father nor his flock of a family could imagine how this dignified government official could possibly be taken away prisoner in Italian hands.

"Let me go and see what they want!" Mother swung her arms as if to push us all backwards. "And you stay in!"—which was meant for the three men that stood there, each one taller than another. Tiptoeing after her to the gate, Mehmet, Hiqmet, and I faced the little group of a dozen soldiers headed by a tall black-eyed man in better garb. Mother stood with arms outstretched, her palms pressing against the side frames of the gate, with a woman's natural instinct to protect what lay behind her.

"Yes, they will come back," the well-uniformed man was saying to Mother in fluent Italian. "The gendarmerie ordered me to bring six officials and leave the other one in charge of you until the rest return and . . ."

"But what will you do with them?" Mother broke in.

"I told you, the gendarmerie wants to give them special-privilege passes so that you won't be harmed by soldiers or anyone else," he replied.

In my head something burned; there was something

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important to tell Mother, and at last I got the chance:

“Mana, moy, you have no cover over your head, not even the jashmak!” But to such an important statement I got no answer.

Mother, her head unveiled without shame, stood facing twelve soldiers. And now their officer, I noticed, was smiling at me, looking intently as if he understood what I said in Albanian. I recall the picture like a little drama, with myself taking part in it. The men inside stood waiting.

The soft brown eyes of my mother looked steadily at the men, and suddenly she accused their leader:

“You are Mustafa, the Albanian who . . .” but there she stopped for half a breath. “And you come to take Albanian men and send them away to Sazan, prisoners.” Her eyes hardened as she looked at the handsome man beside her. The black-eyed Albanian, the honorless traitor to his people and country. . . . The scene changed, for Father and Gani appeared, both dressed up as if they were to go to a wedding.

Within the hour, like sold cattle, the six dignified Efendilers of Krip were marched off before the armed soldiers. The seventh official, Hamdi Efendi, was left behind to look after their families; the Italian gendarmerie had made this exception out of partiality to us.

Hamdi Efendi was the one who had cried that same morning; and now, though he was left free, cowardice

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had squeezed every drop of blood out of his veins. He looked pale as a lemon—the rosy-cheeked Hamdi Efendi.

“He lied, that traitor, for they are prisoners to be taken to Sazan,” Mother said angrily.

Poor Hano, but a few months a bride, showed despair over her lover’s going. Gani had left without saying a word of farewell to her; but how could he speak to her in the presence of Father and the flock of us children? Her head buried in the mattress pile, Hano was sobbing for grief.

“You cry because Gani Efendi has left you?” I asked, approaching almost with the intention of teasing her.

“Oh!” she stormed at me; “it is Father I am crying for!”

Alas, Mother was crying; Meto, Ulvo, all were crying, sobbing melodiously. A lump crept into my throat, and I, too, buried my head in the mattress pile; but no, it was too hot there. I joined Hiqmet by the window; his head hung hidden between his arms. A damp spot on the toe of his brown shoe revealed that he was crying, but without sound. Like his, my head, too, fell limp between my folded arms.

III

We were fleeing from Krip the next morning. Bullets whistled overhead through the foggy air and then

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died away with a choked moan. And we were marching toward them, trying to reach Valona, the only place of escape.

Hiqmet and I sat perched on top of the wagon piled high with our household goods. With a terrified heart, I sat cross-legged among the sacks of flour and pots and pans, holding my pet lamb on my lap. Its weight drew my dress down, exposing my knees. Hiqmet kept reminding me that I was forgetting my dignity.

“Cover your knees, do you hear?”

“I don’t want to. No one will see me up here, three meters above the ground,” I retorted with disgust, while my lamb kept kicking, not a bit grateful that I was saving its life.

“Cover your knees!” Hiqmet was angry now. “The driver may turn his head,” he shouted, pulling at my dress.

Keeping my grip on Locho, I turned to make sure that Mother and the rest were following us. All the seven families of Krip, but for Hiqmet and me, were on foot, each carrying bundles and baskets—half dragging them over the hard-caked mud road which wound among olive orchards and clumps of green marina trees toward the suburbs, two kilometers away.

Whistling shells were coming nearer now. The flames from the far side of the hills before us rose higher and redder as the booming explosions shook the earth, ter-

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rifying even my lamb Locho, who wriggled from my lap in fright and jumped to the ground.

“Mana, Mana! Catch my Locho!” I called to my mother pleadingly; but my pet was gone and Mother paid no attention to my cries. Her deep-set eyes were looking far away over the hills. Her right hand was dragging a bundle; her left rested on her stomach as if she were trying to support some heavy weight hidden under her skirt. I knew what she held there, for I, too, like all of our family, was carrying some of the gold money, the wealth that Father had left in our care. Sewn fast to cambric belts, the pierced gold napoleons were bound tight against our bare stomachs.

“Fighting we were born, and fighting we will die,” a guest had exclaimed at our quiet fireside not long ago. “Sins of the nations,” my gentle mother had sighed then, describing wars as she had known them in her travels before I was born. Those were words that I could not wipe out of my mind—nor can I yet.

Let a war be small or world-wide, either one; the features of both take on the same shape. Terror, torture, and bitter suffering invade men, women, children, and the very animals who understand nothing of what goes on. Soldiers in a war have no hearts, for upon the day when they march out of their homes in that stifling uniform, their hearts remain behind; and so like cannibals they shoot and kill, slaughter and strangle what-

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ever they come across. Even the animals must undergo terror and misery like men.

Before leaving Krip, we had stood and watched those heartless soldiers swing chickens by their heads until their souls left them. With clubs they struck cows on the head, just for the pleasure of seeing gradual death. With the points of their sharp bayonets they scooped out the eyes of sheep and made small cuts on their throats, merely to observe how graceful is the dance of death of this most innocent creature, and to bet on which one would dance the longest.

But I avert my thoughts, and think of these sufferings no more.

In Valona at last, our seven families were received into a three-room house, the home of Hamdi Efendi's sister and her four children. Her oldest, a boy of twenty-three, was on his deathbed, but we never saw his funeral. Mattresses lay on the floors like tiles on a roof, and at night there were three who shared and tried to sleep in each one of them.

Never will I forget the summer heat of 1920—the only sleepless nights of my life. Then mothers tried to comfort their children with soup and rice and macaroni; the fowls that we brought with us had been eaten long ago. Sudden violent knocks, threats with the bayonet, the filthy cursing of soldiers invaded our refuge.

Then it was that my mother, Makbule Hanem, and

the other women who had charge of their husbands' money, would feel the fear of death because of those gold coins which burned against their bare waists. The privies and a jar of dirty old whitewash that stood in one corner of the yard, oil jars and gasoline tins, pickle or tomato cans where only a little juice lay mouldering in the bottom—all these were turned into safety vaults where our mothers deposited their coins, here one or two and there another.

"I am going away from your charge," Mother told Hamdi Efendi one day. Half insane, the lost and feeble man made no objection. And so we of my mother's flock were gone from that pot of purgatory. We made our escape to Hanife's house, and settled there in princely comfort and roominess, though still there was the terror which rose and fell, rose and fell through all Valona, as if the town had been a barometer for the fears of the battlefield near by, with its continual flame and thunder of cannonading.

But most horrible of all to us were the nightly attempts of soldiers to break into our home, their stomachs swollen with liquor. "And I have to protect the honor of these girls," Mother would say, weeping—but not till after the housebreakers had been turned back once more. Bless the iron doors, the fortified windows with their iron bars! That was a house built in

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the primitive Albanian style for protection and defense, to shelter faith and love.

And that woman Sherife, my mother, stood there night after night, revolver in hand, to face the drunken soldiers; a woman who was born and grew up and died in the seclusion demanded of her by Albanian custom. A long black veil had shut her away from the world whenever she stepped outside, but in her own heart there was no fear.

IV

“Liri . . . liri . . . liri!”—the word *freedom* suddenly rang out again, echoing from every side one August day. We had won the war, so people said. The battle had stopped: Italy was withdrawing.

No one knew what sense to make of all this. Yet here were the Albanian soldiers returning freely home. Their clothes, which for weeks had never left their bodies, hung in black and tattered rags; their youthful faces could not be recognized under months of beard-growth.

Women, dumbfounded with ecstatic joy, could not believe in this sudden victory. But soon even their bodily weakness kept them indoors no longer; for months they had seen no friends, had exchanged no gos-

sip with each other. Now their tongues were going like mad, embroidering rumors of every sort. For example:

“The war stopped because the Holy Kuzbaba numbed the arms of the Italian soldiers.” (The Kuzbaba was a saint’s tomb that stood on the hillside just above my sister’s house.)

“That Big Man in Italy who rules the country decided to stop the fighting because he felt too many of his soldiers were getting killed. Heh! and what of our men, who died in bigger number?”

“A group of Albanian soldiers brought down two dozen flying airplanes with shotguns, as if they had been ducks.” (There was one airplane shot down; flying gossip added the other twenty-three.)

“Fortune-tellers had read of this victory in the stars ever since the war began—and the malicious hearts, they would not tell us!”

But the best rumor of all, perhaps, was this:

“That Big Man in Italy had a dream with open eyes one Sabbath morning. The Lord sent him a message by a holy saint to stop his fighting in Albania: ‘For Shqiperia is my favorite land’—that was what Allah told him in the message.”

But why, I wondered, did not Allah stop this bloodshed before? How could he bear to watch the grief of young women left without their husbands, of mothers whose sons were lost, of old fathers who, helpless in

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the world, were left behind to live without purpose or reason? In every second home, or every third, and along the winding streets of the mountain villages, there was crying and lamenting as the delayed funerals for those who had died in the war were held all at once.

The men who had been imprisoned on the Island of Sazan returned at last, bringing back only their bones and souls. To their families they told of the sufferings and the forced labor they had endured. But now, they said, all these things must be forgotten. We were not to weep and mourn for men who had died heroically; we must keep up the old tradition of our ancestors: “The man who dies for honor should not be mourned over.”

So the joy of victory and peace overshadowed the past, and no one spoke of it any more. Even women tried their best to hush their gossip.

For the Albanians have been a fighting people ever since the first tribes of homeless Aryans pushed on toward Europe for refuge. They made their houses along the shores of the Adriatic, building on mountain peaks and over dry rock where nothing grew but hope. From the majestic eagle who still makes her nest on the highest peaks, there to protect her little ones, these primitive men called themselves “Shqipetars”—“Children of the Eagle,” and their rocks, “Shqiperia”—or “Eagle Land.”

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And it is by these names that we call ourselves and our land today; for Albania, the name given us by the Romans, is to our minds only a nickname by which other nations call us. So, too, the West has spoken of our country as Illyria—a word which in our tongue means “The Free Land.” But I and my generation are the first of our fathers’ land who have been born free in modern times. As I remember Father once saying to his friends in a gathering, after his return from Sazan: “There may be little else that we gave our children, but with thankfulness to Allah, we brought them forth on free earth—we gave them ‘liri’!”

v

After 1920, then, the old gayness and frolic were restored as before to all our homes in Krip. We, all the children of the village, were going to school now; Mehmet, Hiqmet and I, Fatime, Ikbal, Surja, and all the others.

The flowers could grow undisturbed again. The wild roses bloomed along the sandhills in colors of pink and white. With every spring it seemed as if the narcissus grew taller and sweeter in the fields. Each morning we drove to Valona with heavy armfuls to present to our teacher. All was beautiful to our eyes, happy were our hearts, and gaily sang the birds and the hundreds

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of workers while the salt was gathered and stored in the summer.

The five years of our early schooling was like gliding in a chariot through the clouds.

Chapter V

“CLIMB THE MULBERRY TREE . . .”

“MISTRESS NEXHO, hurry your legs,” Sotira summoned from the gate; she looked excited as if a king had come.

“Is Mana back from Vlora?” I inquired, concerned at my own interest.

“He—ee, no,” she replied, nodding her head. “Hurry, Nexho, for the foam will be gone from over the coffee.”

“Who has come?” I questioned.

“Xhemal Bey of Vlora,” was the reply.

“That Bey again?” I asked, careless of my bad manners, for Mother was away and could not hear.

“Shesh—shesh, for he will hear you.”

“I can’t serve coffee to him!”

“But, moy Nexho, you never did disobey me so.” Sotira looked puzzled at my positive expression.

“Because I am not to appear before men any more. I—am—grown—up, and will have my veil made soon,” I explained emphatically. Sotira, who was a Christian and came from a broad-minded town, looked pityingly at me.

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“Just this time and no more,” Sotira said hurriedly, “for I could not find your brother”; and before I had time to speak, the tray was in my hands.

“How do I look, Sotira?” I said, preparing to enter.

“You look like a little bride with big, round, blushing cheeks and big eyes, which I wish were dark, and tiny, tiny ears that show your aristocracy, and—hurry, hurry!” and she pushed me toward the guest-room door.

As usual, she had one more word to say:

“Act like a lady, little carnation, for we may have a nephew who will soon need a wife.”

A slight blush was my only reply. The thought seemed real as I entered the guest room, and my cheeks became noticeably red.

“Marshallah! what a nice, bashful daughter you have, Mustafa Efendi,” I expected to hear the guest comment to my father. Instead, I approached unnoticed, my light footsteps making no impression on the stranger. The Bey sat beside the brass mangal, his face flushed with pride. His left hand hovered over the charcoal embers of the round brazier, his right held the cup of coffee which I had just served him.

“E-eff-eff,” he sipped the coffee melodiously. It is considered bad manners to make such noises,—for women it is even a shame,—but not for men like Xhemal Bey. With men of high rank, as Xhemal Bey was,

the living feudal custom pins no fault to their faults; and therefore they are never to be criticized.

At the foot of the room, like a soldier on duty, I stood, erect and dignified, at my best. On the metal tray, which I held pressed against my stomach so as to support its weight, stood a heavy jam bowl containing about a pound of rose-apple jam, two silver spoon holders, a dozen spoons, and a dozen large glasses filled up with water to the very brim. The tray, however, was not supposed to be overloaded; this abundance was merely proof of generosity and high respect for the honored guest.

My eyes should have been looking at the floor, but instead I looked absent-mindedly at the shining rings that glittered on the Bey's hands in the firelight. The talk was in rapid Turkish, so I could not understand what the conversation was about.

Then the Bey stretched his arm to hand me the cup again.

“What has your father named you, oy bukuroshe?” he asked, smiling at me as if he were my uncle.

“Nexhmie,” I replied, careful to keep my voice low and polite.

“Nexmee, eh?” he mispronounced the name.

“*Nej'-mee-ah!*” I corrected, sound by sound.

“Morning Star, eh? Who gave you this Arabic name, oy bukuroshe?”

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“It was my favorite name,” Father came to the rescue, “and she deserves it.”

With a right turn, I hastened out of the room, the contents of the tray dancing a little dangerously.

“Nephew—my older nephew,” I heard the Bey say, when I was about to step out. My heart gave a kick inside me.

“Sotira, oy Sotira, did you listen to what Father said? He said I deserve my name.”

Hiqmet had popped into the kitchen.

“Nexhmo, I was watching you inside, too,” he giggled with pleasure.

“Well, what?” I asked suspiciously.

“Ho, nothing, except that I thought you were going to play leapfrog over Xhemal Bey’s head.”

“Wasn’t I like a lady, oy Sotira?” I asked, turning to her for relief.

“Like a little swallow, but I must teach you to take shorter steps in the house.”

“Eh,” I thought; “she doesn’t know what I heard them saying.” But who could mention such a thing, even to a true servant?

“Her skirts are too short, moy Sotira,” Hiqmet protested seriously, which reduced me to the point of tears.

“You males!” Sotira was angry; “you pop into places where you are not needed and where you don’t belong, and then you come to air your empty notions . . .”

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“But her skirts *are* short; girls of her age wear them almost to the ankles,” my brother rejoined.

“Come, run out where you belong. You males don’t need to worry about your luck—the poor female bears all the worries—eh—and you come here to give us ideas,” she mumbled, as Hiqmet walked out just in time.

Sotira’s last words did not impress me. “Little Nexho”—the title did not fit me any more. My age was twelve, a big girl’s age, and Xhemal Bey was not the first man who had come to propose to Father for my marriage.

“Your mother will bring you a whole roll of cambric from Valona,” Sotira was saying; “and she will cut aprons out of it, and chemises ‘alla Japone,’ and skirts and—oh, who knows what? And you will embroider them in white and red and pink and yellow.”

But these words did not console me, for I was in no hurry to grow up.

II

Visits of important men to our home, and among them many strangers to see my father, came more often now. For all his life Father had saved up his earned wealth in gold money, many times burying it in the ground when the suspicion of danger approached, or else giving it to Mother and us children, as I have said,

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to carry in the form of corsets against our bare stomachs. Now, though, he was turning his wealth all from money to property, and nearly all the gold had been given to strangers in exchange for lots, houses, stores, and a modern hotel newly built by the seashore of Valona.

And not since Hanife's wedding had such mobs of women come to visit my mother. For Hano and Gani had sent word from their new home in Tirana that God had given them a new angel. It was their third child. This excuse was enough to let the women of Valona come visiting to our home in scores.

Krip was an ever-pleasant spot, and its beauty drew the residents of Valona to come and see it at least once or twice a year. But perhaps I should explain that this privilege extended only to men. As for women, how could females wander through fields and hills just for the pleasure of seeing nature's beauty? Their husbands allowed no such thing. “Climb the mulberry tree in the courtyard, and you can see plenty of nature around you—and with no effort,” the husband would tell his wife if she were to complain of not having this privilege.

But women can go visiting. They are fully privileged to pay calls to any home, and the Albanian husband is accustomed not to inquire of his wife what friends she visited that day.

So now the good fortune which had occurred to us brought daily groups of women from the town. On the way, they could take a look at the beauty of nature, the flower gardens, the orchards, the old well-park of Krip, and the art of gathering the salt there and transporting it.

Our vast rooms were not big enough. Fifty women at a time would be sitting on the long couch and on two solid lines of chairs, with more cross-legged on the soft shiltes that lay on the floor in rows. There it was worse, for some occupied too much space by spreading out the heavy folds of their pantaloons, and left no room for others.

Sotira and three young brides served the jams, one made of quince, the other of nut-plum. Next came the balla kums—"Turkish delight." And last came the coffee, hot and thick and with plenty of sugar, for this was a happy occasion.

Mother is standing at the foot of the room. The endless good wishes begin:

Guest: "Wife of Mustafa Efendi" (her right hand hovers over the tray, holding the spoon delicately in her fingers, but she will not dip into the bowl of jam until she has ended wishing), "may Allah bring you many more such happy occasions. Let Allah give your daughter many more boys, and let Allah give your

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husband more power for wealth and health and happiness.”

Mother: “Amen, honey and sugar in your mouth, amen, amen.”

Next Guest: “Tungjatjeta! Long life to all the earth. May we come again for more such blessed occasions.”

Mother: “Amen, honey and sugar in your words.”

Next Guest: “Long life to the master of the home! May your daughter find a good husband, and may Allah choose a good home for her.”

Mother: “Amen, amen. I wish you the same. May I come to your home for the same happy occasions.”

And so the dialogue goes on till dusk, when no more guests can come. . . .

It was tiring, but mother never felt the pain of her feet. She was happy, too happy to notice that the carpets in the guest room were burnt with cigarettes, that the white couch-covers were stained with coffee that would not wash out. Her eyes were veiled with the joy that overwhelmed our house.

For there was not only Hano’s growing family, two girls and now a boy, to make us rejoice; Meto, my elder brother, who had gone to Tirana four years ago to study in the first high school for boys in the country, would graduate in less than a year. This meant that soon he

would marry—a cause for rejoicing at least a year ahead.

But there was still more than all this to make my mother happy for a time. Her only brother, Bilal, had been lost for twenty years. Suddenly one day, as if out of heaven, he came to Krip in search of his youngest sister.

“What these Europeans can do!” people who came to see him exclaimed. “All these years with tuberculosis, and still living!”

Twenty years ago, when he discovered himself to be ill of tuberculosis, Uncle Bilal had fled from the country, leaving his young bride behind in Libohova. Nothing was heard of him until the day when he appeared at our house. He came on crutches, looking wan and pale, but he was alive. What did his illness matter when my mother saw her beloved brother once more?

As for us children, though, Uncle Bilal’s home-coming meant mostly that our grandmother came to stay with us. She was a woman crouched and withered by the eighty years of her life, with nothing motherly left in her but pride. Her figure was bent and her head almost touched her knees when she walked. Once upon a time, so Mother told Hiqmet and me, our nana was five and a half feet tall. But we could not believe it, for we were seeing her for the first time in our lives. Often her walking stick escaped from her shivering

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hand, and one morning she fell after it down the stairs. Only her son's return had brought her on the two-day journey from Libohova to Krip.

For now that her son was found, the son for whom she had lamented and wailed through twenty years, “Son, my son, let me see you once more, even in your grave,” she had returned half to life again. She, too, had loved him as only a single son is loved and worshiped in Albania.

She kissed Uncle Bilal, talked to him and listened to what he said, told him again and again that his young bride had died soon after his desertion.

My grandmother was odd but not insane; her mind was still there.

“When she is in good moods, her mind works better than mine,” Father said one day.

“She is like a child,” Mother defended her mother. “Worse! The children you can spank and they listen to you,” Father remarked.

Every day my mother took her brother by the arm for his trip to get treatment at the hospital. When they returned at noon, Mother had to bring my grandmother candy, two francs' worth of roast lamb (she disliked it home-cooked), and sugared almonds or chick-peas, which she always ate during the night.

On her tray at every meal there were: Salad, thick sour milk, milk with meat balls stewed in it, cheese,

stuffed squash, four big pieces of bread, and a plate piled with fruit. She ate all she could from the tray, washed her hands and lips (all this at her bedside), stuck the remaining fruit in the basket she kept beside her bed, and, thus refreshed, she would leave the house to go visiting in the neighborhood.

We heard from outsiders that my mana starved her mother and did not even give her bread enough; the news had traveled as far as Valona. Such untrue gossip was a disgrace, especially to us children.

One late afternoon, she went to pay a visit to Nijazi Efendi's home. His wife, the half of whose pleasure in life was to listen to gossip and complaints of this kind, received her with the warmest welcome. Before my grandmother sat down, she began:

“Oh, moy Nijazi Efendeshe, I am fading like a candle.”

“What have they done to you this time?” Makbule Hanem asked to encourage the old woman.

“Sherife, my daughter, that scoundrel who today would not be living if I had not brought her into this world . . .”

“Yes?”

“She lets me starve. I have had no supper and I am famished. Give me something . . .” Before she finished her last word, something moved from under the couch.

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“You devil female, sneaking wherever I go!” she shouted in fury; but I stood in the room unmoved.

“Sneaking to hear what an old lady says and carry lies to your mother? I will show you what comes of it—Allah will hear my words and take revenge on you.” This was my grandmother speaking.

“Will my mother get to be the same some day, and one of Hanife’s children take my place?” I wondered with a sad heart.

Makbule Hanem was drowned in shame and said nothing.

“Who told you to hide there—that serpent mother of yours?” asked Grandmother in consternation.

“No, moy Nana. I came myself to find out if the gossip was true,” I replied, a little frightened and ashamed at my own daring.

She rose before I could believe my eyes, and swung her walking stick at my head.

Luckily the guest room was on the first floor. Out the window I flew, carrying with me two flower pots that stood on the window-rail.

Out in the street, people had been attracted by my grandmother’s shouting. They all saw me fly through the window and all laughed at my successful escape.

In the evening, our home was a wasp’s nest of argument. My grandmother wept and complained, trying to make Uncle Bilal say that such a niece disgraced his

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ancestry. Mother and Father, vexed about what I had discovered, burned with shame to hear of my undignified jump into the street.

“But, oy Baba, she almost bruised my skull!”

“*Lipsu* from here! Had you no blood of shame in your veins?”

“But she nearly hit me,” I repeated.

“Don’t you realize that you are practically a woman veiled?” Mother scolded with anger.

“I forgot.”

“She always forgets,” Hiqmet intruded.

Only Uncle Bilal stood there looking sweetly at me.

“Oh, it is no use to veil a wild goat!” The disgusted voice of my father made me shiver.

“What shall I do with her, Husband?” Mother asked, looking at him for help.

“I don’t know—that is your affair.”

“But I never had a child like her. I don’t think there was one so empty-headed in my whole ancestry.”

“Neither in mine,” Father defended his. “How she will ever become a lady, only the Mighty God knows. No husband will keep her more than a fortnight with the sharp tongue that she has. Stuff her mouth with paprika.”

Tears were running down my cheeks; Grandmother was delighted.

“Last week,” Mother went on, “she served uncooked

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coffee to my guests and then stood in the room without a pang of shame. I send her on an errand, and instead she sits in the park to join the workmen in their songs.”

“And she sings solos to them, the songs that Meto taught her,” Hiqmet added to my mother’s complaints.

“That is enough for tonight,” said Uncle Bilal.

It was a long time after Grandmother’s visit, before I learned not to wish that I might die at fifty.

III

“Nexho, O Nexho, where are you,—quick!” Ikbal’s voice called from inside our gate.

We all ran out to see—Hiqmet, Mother, followed by Sotira.

“What has happened?” Mother inquired.

Ikbal wore a frightened look, but was dancing with excitement. She was the child in Krip who loved excitement the most.

“Come out and see. Quick, for they are carrying him by . . .” and she ran out, motioning to us with her hands. We followed, running too.

The red disk of the sun was barely showing over the mountains of Vlora. Quietly, a group of people were walking across the lawn before our house. Four workers carried a man on a salt sack, serving for a stretcher. It was Xha Xhemo, our old guard.

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His watch dog followed him, stopped and again followed, howling at intervals. The geese and chickens, just out of their sheds, looked up. The cock warned them to go, but most remained still.

No one spoke, no one wept but Fatime, the director's daughter. But that was just her weak-heartedness. For Xha Xhemo had no one who would weep for him. His son had died in the war, his wife from grief soon after.

"What happened, Pilo?" Mother called to the head worker.

Pilo came near, saluted, said tungjatjeta then spoke: "He got shot—killed on the spot."

"But who would shoot Xha Xhemo?"

"Nobody, zonya; it was a bomb in the bushes."

"Bomb?" we exclaimed in choric voices.

"Yes, zonya, an old Italian bomb. It had the shape of a doll." He saluted again and hastened to join the procession of the dead guard.

We all could guess the rest of the story.

Early that morning, as usual, Xha Xhemo had set out across the fields, water jug in hand. He was a very pious man, and also very superstitious. Frequently, before sunrise, hares crossed his path. "Cursed! tf—u Allah belavresen—unclean!" He would scream at them, and then go home, refill his jug with fresh water, and return to the fields anew.

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“It is a bad omen to see a hare cross your path,” he used to tell us children. “It means bad luck. To avoid this, you have to do what I do. Come home and go back two-three times, till you see no more hares. . . .”

What had happened to Xha Xhemo that morning had happened every two or three days to someone in the country-side during all these years since the war.

“He apparently touched the bomb,” somebody remarked.

“He must have stepped on the switch that was fastened to it,” another corrected.

“Come in, children, and finish your breakfast. Don’t ever go near bushes,” came Mother’s orders.

“Oh, moy Mana, it was written in Heaven that Xha Xhemo would die of a bomb,” said Hiqmet.

“It was his luck to die by it,” I added.

“Anyhow, don’t go near the bushes.”

“But, oy Mana, we have walked and played hide and seek at night among bushes during these many years.”

“The angels of Heaven protected you,” Sotira exclaimed in ecstatic relief.

“I—said—don’t—go—near—the—bushes!” Mother ordered sharply. Unable to hold her thought within her chest, she said: “They must be putting out fresh ones, for a bomb cannot last for five years undestroyed by sun and rain.”

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“Someone in Vlora said exactly the same thing, Mana,” Hiqmet spoke with a full mouth.

“Don’t mention these things to anyone, my precious lamb,” Mother said; “it is unlucky to speak of them.”

IV

“Mana, when do we leave for the mountains?”

“I cannot go away from home now and leave your father, my child.”

“The doctors said I must go,” I repeated for the tenth time.

“I know, but you can’t go.”

“Why not alone with Hiqmet?”

“Because you are grown up, and therefore you must be near me.”

“But malaria is eating my life away,” I whined down-heartedly. (My face was pale like a stale sea shell from the disease that was brewing in me.)

“What can I do, my child? I cannot let you go away at an age when you are apt to make all sorts of foolish mistakes.”

“I won’t, I can promise you.”

“People find fault with you, even if you are perfect; they create gossip without evidence.”

“Oh, how unlucky I am!” I sighed.

“The honor of a girl is like a fragile looking glass,

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my dear daughter; and if the glass tumbles and breaks,” she pondered, “it is gone for ever.”

“But my malaria, I will die from it,”—and then brightening: “Why don’t you let me go to Hanife’s home in Tirana for a month?”

“Because her young brother-in-law lives with her and he is not married,” she said.

That was enough. Even the tips of my earlobes burned.

I had expected to say next: “You travel every year with Hiqmet and I stay home with Father. Valona is all I have ever seen.” But my chance was gone.

“You have not embroidered on your new sewing machine for a long time, Nexhmo,” Mother interrupted my thoughts.

“My eyes hurt,” I complained; and my eyes did hurt, for during the last six months I had embroidered and crocheted a trunkful of chemises, slips, aprons, table spreads, trunk covers, and window-rail drapes.

From early dawn until nightfall, I had sat embroidering on the new Singer Embroidery Machine. They had just been brought to our country, and were the greatest novelty of the time to women and young girls.

Every day after lunch, for two hours I made carbon-paper copies of flower patterns which a friend had lent me—hundreds of pretty French designs. In the evening, after the meal, I crocheted laces which by now

amounted to half a trunkful. In half a year, I had learned how to cook and to take care of the house, and how to receive guests with polite gestures of the hand, to smile but moderately, to talk politely.

"My, my! Nexho is getting to be a lady," Makbule Hanem praised me. "But my Ikbal is wild. She won't do a stitch of embroidery."

"Why don't you make her do it?" the director's wife asked. She had a grown daughter too, but a stepdaughter whom she could not master.

"Why don't you do that to your girl?" Ikbal's mother asked, trying to hide her anger.

"Fatime is not my daughter, and her father is too soft-hearted with her."

"Nexhmo is just like she always was—don't let the good moments of her mood deceive you," Mother consoled the two women, smilingly.

"Nexhmo!" a voice called from outside.

I ran out, leaving the tray of sweets in the middle of the room, and found Hiqmet waiting.

"There are guests in the house."

"Well, what of it? You mustn't shout so, for you are a man now," I ordered proudly.

"You stop giving orders, for I am three years older, and you are a girl and I am a boy."

In reply I smiled. Such arguments never hurt our feelings, and the love I bore for him had taught me to

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think that Hiqmet was always right. Besides, Hiqmet was fragile—so frail that even his shadow looked delicate and thin.

He swung my braids, which was one of his ways of showing affection, and then he said:

“How will I do without you next year when I go away to high school?”

“You won’t go! You can’t go, for Mana can’t bear to part from you.” My voice broke because of the lump in my throat.

“Oh, but I have to go—a man has to get an education nowadays, and travel and see the world. Baba says so!”

v

Another winter had come, with the days cold and dreary. Heavy rainfalls poured from heaven night and day, and when they stopped the days grew sharp with frost. Then came the rain again.

Many shepherds who had left their homes up in the ice-bound mountains to save their cattle from perishing were little better off in the lowlands this year. The frost shut the ground away from the grazing flocks. The birds lay frozen to death in the fields, or numbed and unable to fly.

“Merciless . . .”

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“What, Sotira?” I questioned.

“The Lord is too merciless this year.”

“Why, Sotira? I wonder why.”

“Because we are a bad people, paprika carnation.
Too many scandals—too much sin is being practised.”

“What will Allah do for it?”

“Revenge. This probably is the start of doomsday,
and then we all shall perish.”

“We have boats, oy Sotira. Can’t we escape like Haz-
reti Nuh?” *

“Cover up your arms, my little flower, and don’t
bother your mind,” Sotira’s sweet voice ordered; and
with these words she left the room.

I was ill in bed, for malaria ruled over me summer
and winter that year. My spleen had grown large, and
every two days I lay ill, burning with fever. Doctors
had made injections on me every summer, and all year
round I took a bitter tonic of diluted quinine. Three
tablespoonfuls a day was the dose; three times a bitter
mouth.

Luckily, I was the only one in our family to suffer
from the prevalent disease of the lowlands, so I re-
ceived all the attention I wanted.

Friends and visitors who came to our house had al-
ways a tonic to prescribe at the tips of their tongues.

* Noah’s Ark.

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Domestic tonics they all were, for our neighbors had lost faith in the ever-striving doctors.

“My niece was worse . . . and do you know how she gets over it every summer?”

“Yes, yes—how?” Mother says in earnest.

“She buys old strong vinegar made of grapes.”

“Yes?”

“And . . . she adds to it a handful of mashed garlic, a piece of nishader,* and the juice of fresh mint, and . . . you mix it well and give the patient about two tablespoonfuls of it every morning at rising.”

“Maybe I will try it,” Mother says doubtingly.

Another capital prescription:

“Take the intestines of a hare three days in succession,—don’t both to wash the intestines, for a hare eats only grass,—and cook them in vinegar and preserved cheesewater over a slow fire.”

“But aren’t they dirty and awful to taste?” Mother inquires, uglyng her face at the thought.

“My child, Mustafa Efendi’s wife, it is a tonic—it isn’t meant to be served to a wedding dinner. She must eat it early in the morning, three days in a row, at dawn.”

Both medicines were tried on me that summer . . . and now winter too had found me no better for all my

* A stonelike drug which is poisonous if taken in quantity.

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weeping and nausea. Flames of invisible fever crept all around me; sharp piercing pains in my legs and body made me toss and turn on my mattress like a fish in the bottom of a boat.

When the fever died down, cold beads of perspiration burst out on my forehead and face. Weak from the fever, at last I lay quiet under my warm yorgan. It was my favorite quilt, for together we had been unseparated friends since I was born.

My gold-embroidered yorgan had been used for Hano, Meto, and Hiqmet when they in turn were babies; but I, being the last born, had inherited the yorgan by right. The reason I loved it was because my most beautiful yorgan grew in size as I in years grew taller. For Mother sewed edgings to the sides, band after band of bright blue velvet.

As I lay thus weak and worn out under my loveliest possession, my hands could do nothing but play with the gold stars scattered over the velvet quilt.

With them I occupied my mind until, lost in unconscious thoughts, I was wandering in distant lands. My never-ceasing wishes to travel then came true. As was my heart's desire, I traveled in boats, in motor cars, and saw Tirana with its streets and houses, just as I had seen it on postcards.

Often I flew through the fields of Krip. I had no wings, but my extended arms served the purpose well

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enough. This was my great pleasure; and for the sake of it, malaria became not such a hard burden to bear. No one saw me fly, nor did they believe it when I told the story to them one evening.

Hiqmet giggled at the thought, and all joined him in laughter.

“We call it ‘fantasy’ in school,” he said, with a cultured air in his expression.

“I learned the word in school too, and I know my flying was not a fant—”

“Yes, you know! You seem to know the word, too,” Hiqmet teased.

“What do I care if you all laugh!—I will do all those things some day.”

“You will become a bird and fly?”

“No. I will travel and see Tirana and Europe, and go to high school like you, and—”

“And fly,” concluded my brother.

“Mana, moy Mana, stop Hiqmet teasing me.”

“Nexhmo, my girl,” said Mother, “you are a woman now, and still you speak such nonsense. Your friends have better thoughts to occupy their minds with. When will you ever grow up? Only Merciful Allah can decide.”

Chapter VI

END OF SPRING

A GENTLE breeze entered through the slightly-opened window, sweeping before it the crispy air of another new year. The last hours of the old year dragged quietly away. I did not know when it went. Only the ringing voice of our cock reminded me that the dawn of the "New Day" was about to come.

"New Year," I whispered. "No celebration this time. No; nothing but tears and sorrow." But then a sudden joy flapped its wings inside me. "Allah, when will I travel—this year maybe? . . . Allah, you only know my wish—Amen." Those wings of fancy flapped again, harder, and were about to fly.

"Oh, I am going to travel, for I did not sleep to-night." The words escaped unconsciously from my lips, though very faintly. Turning the thought over and over, I convinced my heart that my wish would be heard, for at last I had managed to stay awake through the long hours of a New Year's night.

People said that the heavens opened during this highly sacred night, but only for an instant; and if a

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wish was made during that atom of time, God heard it and it would be fulfilled.

A moving shadow on the opposite wall sent fear through my spine. I turned my head in horror—but the moving form on the whitewashed wall was only the flickering shadow of the candle flame.

The serenity of thought left me; a heavy weight settled over my heart. I blinked harder so as to keep awake, looked at the wax candle and hated its presence there, plundering my thoughts.

The cool, shadowy room looked like a silhouette. All was black and dark except for the red tongue of the melting candle that stood watch beside the bed of Hiqmet. It shivered in the breeze like a malicious serpent's tongue, bent and twisted. But Hiqmet lay in bed with his eyes closed, peacefully asleep.

Sixteen days had dragged away in pain and suffering since he had fallen ill of pneumonia. The dawn of the seventeenth was about to come; that day which, like the judges in court, was to hand my brother over to life or death.

“On the seventeenth day pneumonia turns to better or worse,” Dr. Ali had told my parents. But our love for Hiqmet wished to accept no such prophecy of doctors. For we knew that he would live; even he was full of hope—or was he pretending?

“How simple it all is,—how plain,—to have Fate

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decide the verdict of Hiqmet's soul," I thought in silence as I sat near my sick brother, tending to his cares. "It is Fate, Fate, that shall decide; you cannot tear it from your neck."

A small distance away from me, Mother had dozed off as she sat there for the seventeenth night, looking after her precious son. Her eyes could no more stand the long nights of sleeplessness, and, seized by utter weakness, she had fallen into a sound sleep as she sat cross-legged on the shilte. I did not dare to wake her.

My father, burdened with hard official business, slept more comfortably in the next room. All were asleep except for the bats outside, for those malicious shadows on the wall, and for me and my thoughts.

Was it Fate, I wondered, that brought these sufferings to my delicate brother? Did Allah have nothing to do but see that happiness was no more to remain in our home? Or could it be that Hiqmet's fragile body was too weak to overcome the illness? Were all his operations when he was a child of seven to blame for this?

My heart filled with horror now, as it did whenever I recalled the incidents of those days: Father and Mehmet beside me, waiting outside the tiny hospital for the doctors to bring the tidings,—the despair of my father, his knees shaking together as he stood there pressing his hands to his sides,—Meto and I weeping, sobbing quietly for fear that Hiqmet would die.

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But Mother? She was at home, and what she felt only God knew.

At last a doctor had appeared at the door, another, then two more, all wiping their hands with snow-white towels. What blank expressions they wore! Their frozen hearts permitted no tears to descend from their eyes.

Rasaps, butchers, that's what they were!—but oh, no. They smiled, said kind words, and assured us that Hiqmet was saved; no more infection would occur.

"It is the last operation," they said. They had operated on Hiqmet's throat and discovered two veins overlapping and growing together.

Unseen, though, some infection had remained inside. He could not move his head. For a year and two months more he was carried again and again to the hospital; the scar descended far down the left side of his chest.

When at last I had my playmate back, he had grown like a tender flower that no one dared to touch for fear it would break. But Allah was merciful. He had raised Hiqmet, given him the keenest mind, beauty, humor to laugh and play. . . .

An owl screamed out into the stillness of the night, a second answered, and their echoes died away into the distant fields of Krip. Silence again followed.

I still sat there beside him, afraid to move my stiff leg for fear he would wake. I turned my head half in fear and looked at Hiqmet closely, but he rested in quiet

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sleep. My ear caught the faint stir of the Big Water, and I knew the dawn was drawing near. My ears knew too well the voices of the Adriatic; we had learned its language as we grew beside it.

A cold sweat forced itself on my forehead; the kind which is caused by fright.

I afraid? How could I be, when many a time I had walked through the darkness of stormy nights and never felt the weakness of fear? But the owls . . .

A rippling tune broke out into the stillness of the early dawn; a familiar song warmed my frightened heart. It was Sadik, our old shepherd, taking out his sheep.

The melody of the flute grew nearer, and I knew Sadik was descending with his flock from the hills. He plunged into a merry tune next, a song which filled me with longing for Sadik and the free hills which he and his sheep walked on.

Oh, if I could only sing, then the shadows which had haunted the walls all through the night, and the screams of the owls outside which meant a bad omen, could not bring me fear.

Again I looked up at Hiqmet, but surely he was sleeping. His lids were closed; all I could see were two moons of eyelashes resting peacefully on the hollow of his eyes.

How I wished for a kind fairy to come and take the sufferings of my brother away, so that again we two could run out into the fields, holding each other by the little finger! Then down the valley and up the hills we would go, and there end our run by the hut of Sadik.

“Goo-goo-oo-floo-o-oo,” the distant cry of a moaning bird rang outside. The sad tone of it carried my heart away on a hurricane of fear. Panic seized me.

Hiqmet’s left arm hung limp over the edge of his bed, and my hand grabbed it before I knew. I drew it against my side, my arms folding over it tightly.

“Nexho. What are you doing?”

“Oh, Hiqmet Xhan, why did I wake you?”

“I was not asleep, moy Nexho—I was awake, but I kept still to let Mother sleep.”

“I got afraid of the owls and—did you hear Sadik playing ‘Hayde moy Shqipetare’?”

“Yes—I sang it through in my head.”

“It is New Year, Hiqmet—”

“Nexho, Happy New Year!” Hiqmet stole the words from me.

“*Per shume mot egezuar* to you, too.”

“Is your heart sad, Nexh, because we cannot go out to the fields and pick flowers and carry home untouched water from the well, as we always have?”

“Not much. I only want you to feel better and—

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Hiqmet, brother, you won't go?" The words escaped from my lips in sudden haste. It seemed he did not understand their meaning.

"Yes, moy Nexh, I leave tomorrow afternoon; the boats sails by sunset," he at once replied. A smile lit up his face.

"You look so well tonight; do you feel well?"

"I must feel well, for tomorrow I leave you—for Italy."

"Oh, how lucky, lucky you are to travel!" and a silly joy leaped up within me.

"Have you made the list of the things you want me to bring you?"

"No; Mana said it was unnecessary."

"She is right. I can remember them." A second smile brightened his face.

Never before had I felt such love for him; I could not believe that we would ever part. Only the long hours of this New Year's night with him had brought to life the love and devotion which I bore for my brother and playmate.

"The night before the day that a sick person is to die, he gets almost well. That's the sign of death." The words haunted me again and again as I realized the sudden change in my brother.

"Allah, Lord, save him! Is this a sign that the worst will come? . . . He is leaving tomorrow, he says?"

END OF SPRING

Mother rocked gently in her place, still unable to believe that she had slept.

"Mother's boy, why did you not call me when you saw me fall asleep?"

"I had Nexho tonight, moy Mana," Hiqmet replied sweetly. His voice was clear.

"You have stayed awake all night, Nexhmo child!"

"Together with Hiqmet," I replied.

"We had not talked so long together for sixteen days, moy Mana." Hiqmet smiled a third time.

"Sixteen days—the seventeenth," she must have said to herself, for her face in the last candlelight became like a shriveled lemon.

"I must go wake Father," she said.

II

The sun rose over a beautiful bright day. But the rays of sunshine that had crept into the room did not cheer Hiqmet as usual.

He smiled no more, for his lips had grown thick under the purple color that veiled them. His eyes, still blue, wore a steadfast look, perhaps gazing at the hand of death.

Mother touched the tip of his nose with her palm. She felt his feet under the covers, then withdrew to stand beside his bed, paralyzed in stillness. Father, too,

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was in the room, and Sotira also, but all remained quiet.

What was to happen, why all this change? I could not understand. I had never before seen death, never really believed in its power until this Sabbath day.

“Oh, Mother, Mother, how can I bear the pain of his death?” The words choked in my throat—tears rolled instead.

“Nexhmo, leave the room and get something to eat,” ordered my mother.

Sobs, loud sobs broke from my chest, for Hiqmet had been gazing at me for a long time.

“Nexho, better go out,” a second order came from Father. I left the room.

“Nexhmo, my girl, you are brave, you must be brave,” a voice was saying beside me when the door had shut. I lifted my head to look at Mother for help.

“Hiqmet can’t stay with us—he must go.” Her voice quivered, but no tears stood in her eyes. “Hiqmet must go away happy, and we must not spoil his trip. Try to be brave, Nexhmo girl—just a few more hours.”

The day drew its hours into the late afternoon. Krip lay in stillness, for the sorrows of illness and death lingered elsewhere too.

In Valona, children and grown-ups were dying from diphtheria like flies; and the doctors—they were too few to attend even to the rich—did what they could with their two hands.

END OF SPRING

"Doctor! Where is the doctor?" Hiqmet called in a thick voice now and then, but no doctor could spare the time to come.

A whistle's blast, two, three, were heard from the port, where the *Puglia*, the evening boat, announced its departure for Italy.

"Father, do you hear *Puglia* calling?"

"Yes, my precious son, but we shall go next week."

"No, Baba, I cannot go—I leave today." Tears stood trembling in the folds of his eyes, but he drew them in again.

"Mana, where are my books? I want to see them before I go."

He turned every book over in his hands, forced a smile at each one, and on the front leaf of the last he scribbled his name: "Hiqmet Mustafa Zaimi." Suddenly his hand fell limp. . . .

Hiqmet, who had grown up like a tender flower, was dead because of his beauty and vigor as a child. For when he was little, visitors, friends, relations, all would wish to stroke his light hair, would bend to give him a kiss on the cheek. But among my father's friends there were two or three men with inhuman greed for love of a boy. They were not childless men, but greedy because they had no sons of their own—and to my father who had a boy, they brought the greatest sorrow that was ever to befall him.

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When they saw nobody looking, they could not be content unless they pressed their palms against Hiqmet's milk-white cheeks and lifted him up by the head to kiss him. First left, then right, each cheek received a long-lasting kiss—his heavy body swinging in the air, until once two blood veins burst and ran together in the slender neck.

I had seen those men contenting themselves blindly in that way, but I was too young to understand and could not even speak well as yet. All I felt was jealousy. And when my parents discovered them, it was too late.

The day after the funeral of Hiqmet, when my father had stood for a long while before the open window of the living room, tears mastering his heart, he raised his face to the sky and with clenched fists exclaimed:

“The cursed undying hunger of mankind has killed my precious son.”

Chapter VII

THE SWALLOW HOVERS

A STORMY wind had risen from Mount Karaburun that towered beyond the blue Adriatic. We could see the waves splashing high into foamy crests, while the ships between them rocked savagely like suspended cradles.

Its arms grew stronger as the wind left the raging blue water and flew in speed over the sandhills by the shore, sweeping forward clouds of sand from the little Sahara. Then branches of trees cracked from their trunks and fell to the ground with nests and baby birds among them. Tiles from the roofs of houses and from the stored salt pyramids rolled over their mates till they reached the ground and crashed loudly in pieces. The walls of the houses shook, and the window panes shivered within their frames.

“Better close the window shutters, Wife,” my father’s order interrupted the tense stillness of the room where we three sat around the brass mangal warming our hands.

“Better get up and shut the window leaves,” again

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Father repeated, but for the first time in my life I saw Mother pay no heed to his order. Nor did she turn her head away from the window, for her eyes were fixed as if searching for something beyond the transparent glass.

Both Father and I knew what Mother's heart lamented in silence as we sat watching her with slow-beating hearts. The same words of pain had been eating her heart away ever since her precious son had died:

"Hiqmet, my boy, is the wind blowing the earth away from your grave, and you lying there with nothing but a cambric wrap over your body, while I sit here in my room in comfort before a blazing fire? Why did death tear you away from the beauty of the earth in the spring of your age, my precious boy of sixteen? And I sit here in comfort, I, your mother, Hiqmet boy, who swore never to let you go from her breast. How long do I have to stay on the face of the earth to cry and lament in vain? When will be the day for me to come near you, boy, my boy? How much longer will I remain in my blackened home and haunt the heart of my husband and child like a ghost in search of the place where it belongs?

"Hiqmet, boy, my boy, I hear your cries mingled with the whistling wind—your words rippling in my ear: 'Mana, I am cold. Water has filled my grave, Mana, moy . . . ?'

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These were the words with which Mother was accustomed now to lament.

With the passing months, there had appeared no change in the heart of my mother. The wound for her lost son grew sharper, and more painful grew her lamenting cries.

Like all else in my mother's life, her devotion and endless laments for her lost son grew out of tradition and custom.

The grandmother of my own mother had been famous for her voice, and so in turn had her own mother, who had died soon after losing her only son. Their praises and virtues were remembered because they had had the voice of a nightingale—though their throats sang only at occasions of lamenting.

It was the duty of my mother, then, to carry on the honor and reputation of her perished ancestry. She could no longer step out of her home, but must sit in the room, cramped in stale air by dozens of visitors, and lament for Hiqmet three times a day—four hours of daily lamenting in fitting phrases.

Five such months my mother had been through—enough to end her soul; yet she was expected to stay home, lament, and moan for at least five years. Neighbors and the endless visitors who came to Krip spread the highest reputation about my mother, not because she

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looked intelligent and spoke little, or because of her hospitality, but mainly because she cried, "Boy, my boy Hiqmet, bie-o-bie Hiqmet," so loudly that it reached the ears of men a kilometer away.

II

"Nexhmo, Nexhmo child, wake up, for the sun is rising high."

I jumped out of bed with fright and turned around to see who had called me, but no one stood there in the room.

What was so strange in the appearance of the room? I wondered in fear. The little oil lamp still remained burning on the corner ledge. Father's bed remained as he had left it when arising. And his things, why were they not put away? Night-gown, vest, and house-coat lay scattered all over the room.

Where could Mana be, I wondered, as fear seized me. Had she not waited on Father that morning as she had done all the days of her life? Mana seldom fell ill, and the times I had seen her ill in bed were so few that I could count them on my fingers.

And now, where was she? Could Mana be lying in the other end of the house which we had abandoned since the death of Hiqmet? I had often discovered her there, weeping in the big living room where he had

died. But that was only at night when Father and I slept.

Father was particular about being served, and especially in the morning. Neither Sotira nor I had succeeded in waiting on him to his satisfaction. Only Mother knew the art of serving him as he expected, so that he would not be troubled to extend his arms more than necessary. For why had Allah created wives on this earth?

I rubbed my sleepy eyes . . . and there was Mother looking at me silently from her bed, her cheeks flushed scarlet.

“O God, what can this mean? Allah Merciful, Allah Merciful!” My heartbeats called in vain, because God must have been too occupied with the beauty of that May morning.

“Nexhmo, child, your eyes are red from rubbing. Run out and throw some cold water on them,” she said, patting me on the arm.

“Moy Mana, why have you stayed in bed?”

“Better hurry, Nexhmo girl. Dress yourself, for the room is cold.”

“But what has happened to you overnight?” I asked, hoping only to hear that she was not ill.

“I have a slight cold in my chest, but don’t let that disturb your heart, my brave girl.”

“But where did you catch it?” I persisted. “How could you, when you never step out of the house?”

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"Nexhmo, my little flower, don't look so sad, for I am ill and that makes me worse. Do get up and dress yourself."

I rose in silence and was walking toward the oil lamp which still burned in its corner, when I saw a swallow enter through the open window. It did not fly around and around the room as swallows often did when trapped by open doors and windows, nor did it beat against the walls when dashing for escape.

No, as I watched the swallow, it did not look disturbed to be there. It hovered tranquilly just above my mother's head, its lustrous wings fanning the air in slow rhythm.

"Mana, look," I was about to say with great surprise, but in time I noticed that Mother, too, had seen the swallow. I noticed her gazing mysteriously at the flying intruder.

Very often I had heard from grown-ups and children that the souls of the dead sometimes return to earth in the shape of birds or animals. A pure soul came like a bird, I was told, and could be distinguished from others because it showed no fear and then vanished away into space. It meant death if the disguised soul flew over a sick person, I remembered to have been told.

Could it be Hiqmet, my brother, visiting in the shape of a swallow? Did Mother know the mysterious

intruder that hovered persistently over her bed? Allah Yarabi! The flying visitor moved its wings in perfect grace, its head bent downward.

Then it flew! It glided through the air and out of the window without a struggle to find its way, and outside it vanished among the many hundreds of swallows that twittered and danced over the blue sky of Krip.

"Was it not strange how it hovered in space?" Mother asked, turning to me. She smiled, trying to hide the truth, but in vain; for I knew that she, too, had received the flying visitor with the same thoughts as mine.

"Nexhmo, won't you cook some coffee for me after you dress?" she said, unable to bear with my standing there before her and searching for the truth in her eyes.

"Po, Mana," I nodded, and walked out of the room, each step I took driving me to deeper pits of sorrow.

I found Father in the room as I returned with the coffee in hand.

"The doctor is here to see Nijazi Efendi, and soon will be here to see you," he said to Mother.

"But, Baba," I intruded, seized by a sudden sense of responsibility, "the house is untidy. Even the beds are not yet made. How can we receive him in such a state?"

"Then hurry and tidy the room. You are not little; your friends are married and bear children." And with this bitter reproach, Father left for his office.

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"Nexhmo, child, don't cry," Mother begged from where she lay. I tried to push my sobs downward, but my chest would hold the weight no more.

"Nexhmo, my girl, don't get hurt at your father's words, for all fathers are the same. They don't know when to scold and when not to. Come here near your mother." Her arm extended toward me.

"How do you feel, Mana dear? Your voice sounds almost well now. Are you getting well?" I questioned again, hoping against hope.

"Better hurry, my lamb, and fix the room before the doctor comes." She drew my head with both hands to kiss me on the cheek.

Strength and a firm grip came to me suddenly. The beds were made up smooth and tidy, the long couch was shaken, and the covers on it put gracefully in imitation of my mother's way of doing. I even watered the vases of growing carnations which were suspended from the window balconies.

"You are a butterfly, my Nexhmo; you are as swift as the wind." Mana was smiling as she praised me, while I flew in and out the room, gliding on pride. "Let your father dare to scold you once more, and now I shall know how to answer him."

My arms felt stronger; wings seemed to grow on my feet.

"I have always said that when you want, there is

nothing that you cannot do," Mother continued; "and today you prove it. . . . To see with my own eyes that my daughter is afraid of nothing—O God, Elham-dy-li-lah!" Her words poured like honey into my heart, and sweeter. . . . There was balsam in each word, and this I needed most, to comfort my wounded spirit.

I looked up at her, hesitating at what I had to say, but it was true in my heart:

"Mana Xhan, I can do anything—I will do everything—until you get well. I can take care of you and the house, and cook meals for Father—but only get well. I can even go and see to the cows and inspect the bees when I have time. . . ."

Dr. Ali had come and gone, leaving the news after him that my mother had double pneumonia. The faithful friend of my father and mother had tried to make Mother confess how the dreadful cold had found way in her, but she would not tell.

"I know the answer," Dr. Ali had said at last. "You have sat out on the balcony night after night, eating your heart away with grief and tears. No doubt you brought sufferings to yourself willingly."

I knew the meaning of this, for I had often suspected that Mother spent her nights weeping at the end of the long balcony which faced beyond Valona to Mount Kuzbaba, where Hiqmet lay.

"Coward," said a voice inside me; "coward!" Then

it was gone. Who? I? How could that be, when my mother, the best judge on earth, had crowned me with praises and said that I was brave? "You can do anything when you want: I always knew it. . . ." Did not my mother say these words?

"Heh, 'Coward,' I will show you how wrong you are, you jelly-hearted self!" I wiped my tears off with the corner of my dress and stood up from the fire-place, where I had been cooking supper for my father.

Late that evening, Father and I were eating our supper in silence; neither one had anything to say.

All of a sudden, I noticed his blue eyes looking hard at me as if unable to believe what he had discovered.

"Nexhmo, I did not know that you were the image of your mother," he said. A smile mingled with a hidden joy lit his tired face.

III

"What day of the week is this, Nexhmo?"

"Friday," I replied shortly.

"Why didn't you tell me that tomorrow is Bayram, Nexhmo, my girl?" Mana asked with a hurt tone.

"I thought you did not want me to speak of it. Besides, I forgot about it myself," I replied pretendingly.

"You should have reminded me, my girl; you know my mind is not here. You could have prepared the house for the occasion a little, and perhaps could have cooked

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a small Bayram dinner for tomorrow. Never mind that—we forgot," she smiled, trying to veil the sadness of her eyes. "There are many more Easter days ahead of you."

"Easter cannot come to our home with Hiqmet away and you sick in bed," I said, lowering my head to hide my tears, while hammers of repentance beat upon my heart. "Don't cry, moy Mana, don't cry, for you are sick enough. Hiqmet is in Heaven, happier than we two," I pleaded.

"It is you I cry for, Nexhmo. Hiqmet now is gone, but you, my child—for you to be watching over a dying face, day and night, with no one to help you—no one to utter a word of consolation . . ."

"Don't say such words, Mana dear. Please don't!"

"You know that I will die soon, Nexhmo. . . . You are not alarmed to hear me say I will die, are you?"

"Oh, moy Mana, my heart, don't say that dreaded word again. I cannot bear to hear you speak and speak of it. Mana Xhan, I cannot let you go, I cannot bear the pain of your absence, I won't live without you, for you are my moon and sun . . ."

"That is enough, Nexhmo!" she said, stopping my dramatic cries. "Where did you learn all that?" But I did not answer.

"Nexhmo, my flower, my heart is so happy now. It is beating fast from joy."

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I raised my head and looked puzzled at what she was saying.

"I am happy, my flower, for now I know how much you have learned. You are not a child in your mind, as I thought; you are grown up. You have even learned the last thing I expected you to know. You don't need to be taught; your ears and eyes have taught you wonders," she said, with a rising power in her voice.

"I was sorry to leave, for I thought your mother was leaving you before you were prepared for life. Oh, but no! I am leaving you prepared and ready to face this big world." She paused, smiled slightly, and again went on: "You have even listened to my laments, and you have changed them into beautiful phrases that would touch even a stony heart."

I still did not understand, until suddenly she questioned:

"Nexhmo, speak the truth. Have you learned how to lament, too?"

"Yes, Mana."

"Then you will lament for me? You know Hanife never learned how. Won't you lament for your mother on her funeral day? I don't want to have my friends pity me. I don't want anyone to say that I was buried without a tune of mourning."

"Yes, Mana, I will."

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"Then I will be watching you. I will be at your side, ready to help when you need me. . . ."

And so for twelve days I sat every evening at my mother's side, listening to her good advice.

"You must face misfortune with hand on heart, for it, too, is like a guest who comes and goes," she said. "Father will get married soon after I am buried. He may marry a wife from Gjirokastra, but you must not be unhappy over this, because your father will be in need of a wife. He cannot come home in the evening and face closed doors and a dark house."

"But Sotira will be here, and I—"

"You will go to live with Hanife in Tirana, and in the fall you may go to high school as your wish has been.

"I had dreamt to see you grow with the care of my soul and blood, and the best love of my heart—to watch you with my eyes and help you with my hands, to see you become the symbol of our family and of all Valona and Krip."

"For you I will do anything," I wanted to say. Instead, I looked in silence at the two glittering lamps in the hollow of her eyes.

"Your father may come home soon. Make haste and open my big chest," she ordered.

In perfect bewilderment, I carried out her order.

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"Take all the things out and bring my wedding bohcha here."

I piled high on the floor all the square bundles wrapped in colored cloths. At the bottom of the chest lay the folder of blue velvet that I was looking for. I carried it to my mother's side.

With her trembling hands, she lifted from between its folds a box of lavender color. She placed it on her stomach and lifted up the lid. One by one, she took out of it two ring boxes, a gold bracelet, a brooch shaped like a butterfly, the silver cup which my Uncle Bilal had given her as his favorite token; then she rested her right hand beside it. More things were sorted out of the box and placed on my lap: another ring, the gold and silver belt which Father gave her on their wedding night. After hesitation of her hand, she drew out her priceless necklace, followed by a small bag tied with strings. The necklace was a three-looped chain, with seven pendoliras suspended from each row. The pendoliras were old valuable gold coins, each worth from five to ten napoleons.

I looked with uneasiness at the jewels which she had put on my lap. Their weight brought more discomfort to my mind. It was intolerable to watch my own mother part with the possessions of her life; besides, what would Father say?

"Nexhmo, put the box back in the bohcha, and the

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things into the trunk as you found them. Then go and get a white cambric bag to put these things in."

Once more I obeyed her orders. But as I returned with the cambric bag in which to put the jewels that were sorted out of the box, my hands were paralyzed with fear.

"These jewels are yours, my girl. They were mine. Now they belong to you," she said.

"But I don't want them; what will Father think when he discovers it?" I protested.

"Nexhmo, you will need them all. Let Hano keep the jewelry for you, and wear it when you grow up. In that bag there are ninety-three napoleons, which you may need for your schooling."

"But what shall I do with them?"

"Tie the bag-strings well, and put them all under the foot of the couch, under the mattress. It will be the safest place in the house, for no one will bother to shake or turn the mattress. Besides, no one will dare to steal anything from a room where a dead person is lying. See that there are no cracks in the boards underneath where you put them."

"Yes, Mana."

"Keep them there until the day after my funeral. Then give them to Hano to take care of."

"But Father—what will he say?" I reproached.

"Tell him nothing as long as you are here. When you

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go to Tirana, then you may write to him that I gave them to you with my own hands. But don't mention the money, for he does not know I had that extra sum; I had saved it for your trousseau. Now you may spend it for whatever you want. Don't get married young, for you are not used to hard work. You have not yet learned how to obey and take orders. Don't let your stepmother take control over you, but for my sake respect her, and try not to hurt your father."

"Moy Mana, don't think of such things!" I pleaded, throwing myself down by her side.

We both were weeping when Father entered the door.

"What is happening here? What is this nonsense that you females must show?" he scolded. He bent over his wife, felt her forehead, asked how she felt, straightened up again, and sat down on the couch.

"Husband, I am going to die—take care of Nekhmo—don't let your new wife toy with her temper."

"Bah, what is this nonsensical talk? Who said you will die?" he asked, moving uneasily on the couch.

My heart skipped its beat. What if the bag went "keir" underneath—what if it dropped on the floor?

Father looked at his dying wife with grief, his fingers turning the counting beads fast on their string, a cigarette in his other hand.

"Baba," I called softly after a while, "Mana is not

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well. She may die tonight. Can't you call the neighbors to come and spend the dark hours with us?"

No answer came. Father had fallen asleep.

I turned my head to look at my mother. She lay still with closed lips, her eyes tight shut.

"Mana, my dear, when did you leave me?" I screamed out in terror.

"My child, I have not left you, I will not leave you before I see Hano and Meto. For you, I have held my soul between my teeth until I see Hano and Meto and leave you in their hands. They will take care of you and never make you unhappy. . . ."

IV

Threads of hair were fluttering on my forehead, and a single one tickled my eyelid repeatedly. The hot rays of the sun were streaming in through the open window, falling directly over my bed. The gold embroidery of my velvet quilt sparkled gaily from the sunrays.

"Oh, how is Mana?"—and I ran to the next room without taking time to dress or smooth back my disheveled hair.

As I entered, Mana smiled and two visitors who sat on her bedside stood up to embrace me.

"Oh, Hano, Meto, you are here! When did you come—why did you not wake me—how late is it—

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isn't it Easter today?" I said excitedly, as my brother and sister kissed me on both cheeks. "Oh, you are here at last. Mana had been waiting for you," I went on, but neither found words to reply.

"Mana, how do you feel? Are you much better today?"

"Yes, my child, I am better today," she replied, parting her lips with a smile.

But, alas! as I came near her, my eyes could not decide whether it was my own mother that lay there. No, she was not the same Mana that I had left last night, not the same one that I remembered through all my living days.

My whole body trembled as I raised my hand to feel the tip of her nose with the center of my palm as she once had felt her son's. It was as cold as frosted iron. I felt her ears, but they, too, were cold and purple. I felt her temples and her chest, but they were beating very faintly. She smiled in comprehension as I drew back. I looked at my mother and my mana looked at me. I said no word, and this time she did not smile. Her eyes turned again to the ceiling as I remained standing before her bed. I shed no tear, just as she not long ago had not let her heart pour out sorrow before her dying son.

My sister and brother stood silently, looking at me in ignorance. They never had seen death before.

And so we stood until the sun was setting beyond

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the Adriatic, its rays drowning deeper into the blue sea. Birds outside were chirping loudly as they gathered on tree tops for the night, and church bells of the Christian faith were ringing from far away.

The hours of the night passed quietly, for I had fallen asleep as I sat on the couch, sobbing and weeping for my mother.

I woke at dawn to find the room filled with rows and rows of women. They sat in silence, puffing away packs of cigarettes and sipping black coffee with no sugar, as it is served at funerals. In the center of the floor my mother lay, taking her last rest in luxury.

"Why did you let me sleep? Why is the room so quiet, moy Hano?" I turned to ask my sister who sat near me.

"It was best that you sleep, Sister. The guests did not mind keeping quiet."

Half awake, I bent over the deathbed of my mother to kiss her once more before she should be taken away. Suddenly the echo of her words rang in my ears:

"Nexhmo, won't you lament for me? I don't want my friends to pity me and say, 'Poor Sherife was buried without a word of lament.' Hano never saw death; she does not know how to mourn."

Sobs broke from within me, words of sorrow came to my lips; and before I knew, I was lamenting for my dead mother.

The whole room joined in the melody, and thus the half-day ended until Mana was carried away in a black coffin on whose lid was painted a single branch of rosemary. Two hundred men received her at the gate.

v

That evening we sat in the kitchen,—Father, his son, and his two daughters,—silently swallowing more tears than food.

“And now who will be next? O God, let me be the one,” I gasped silently, for on that same day I had overheard a woman saying that death in the family never stops at two. “It is always three,” she had said. Her words tortured my soul for years afterwards, as I waited in agony for a third catastrophe that never came.

At last we stood up and bade Father good-night. But as I followed out after my sister and brother, he called to me.

“Nexho, are you very sleepy?”

“No, Baba,” I replied, turning back.

I sat down beside him, watching his pale face through my pouring tears. My hand slipped into his; I felt his body shivering. Tears were flowing down his cheeks. He was crying for the first time that I ever remembered.

“Baba, don’t cry, for it is harmful to Mana’s soul for

us to shed tears at night," I begged, as more tears overwhelmed my eyes.

He swallowed, wiped his eyes, and began to roll a cigarette with his shivering hands.

"Nexho, you had better prepare your things, for you are leaving with Hano and Meto for Tirana tomorrow."

"But, Baba, what will become of you?"

"I will do something for myself by and by," he replied, lighting his cigarette.

"What will you do? Get married, I suppose?" I questioned abruptly.

"That . . . that is what I want to ask you about," he stuttered. "It will be your choice entirely. You either have to stay home and take care of me, or you can go to high school and I will have to marry."

"How can you think of marriage again, Baba? How?" My heart pounded faster as I pictured a new wife coming to take my mother's place.

"You may choose either," he said again.

"Then I must decide now," I answered. "Very well, Baba, you may marry and I will go to high school. But will you give the word of promise that you are to have no children? You must pledge your oath on the soul of Mana," I ended, breaking into hysterical sobs.

"Nexho, child, I promise."

Chapter VIII

SHERIFE'S DAUGHTER

THE shiny Chevrolet advanced toward the city of Tirana. My stomach still was churning as the car bumped its way toward the end of Kruga Durries, the highroad that brought us into the city.

“Ah, Tirana, Tirana!” I exclaimed in ecstasy; “here we are, at last!”

Forgetting that I was grown up, I rose from my seat and stretched my head forward to take a peek at the mirror which hung in the front of the car, just above the chauffeur’s head. I wanted to see if my hair looked neat, but instead I noticed the driver’s face; he was laughing and looking at me with the corner of one eye. It upset my joy to see this strange man smiling at me—as if I were not grown up, and far superior to him in rank!

Was the black-moustached stranger amused because I looked at myself in the mirror? Why shouldn’t I? Why was the mirror hung there before us all? Simply to ornament the automobile, perhaps? Or could it be that only men were to use the looking glass in public?

Hano tugged at my dress and told me to sit still; I

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was not a boy. "It is dark; no one will see your untidy hair," she said.

"Auy—yy-ay-aa," the chauffeur blew the brass horn attached to the outside of the Chevrolet. But not even the donkeys who passed before us bothered to look behind or step out of the way. To my pounding heart, the horn-blasts seemed a ceremonious announcement to the passers-by that we had come.

But there must have been something wrong with them, for no one stopped to shout words of welcome at us, nor did children run after the miraculous "tromopil," as they did in Valona.

With happy ignorance, I turned to Hano and asked:

"Don't women here run to the window to watch when a Chevrolet passes by, and look to see who is inside it?"

Before Hano could speak, the chauffeur replied: "You are not the King's mother, nor even one of his sisters, little lady of Krip!"

The driver speaking to me? I could not understand. "Eh—I have come to a big city, as big—as big—" I thought in silence. I had never imagined the world could be so large—I, who had never before been outside the regions of Valona. I could not even understand how this luxurious cart, with couches from side to side and windows that moved up and down, could fly for eleven whole hours with us all inside it. It must have invisible wings, I thought, as old women in Valona had

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exclaimed when automobiles were first to be seen there.

“Look, this is our Hotel International, and there is the old one,” said Gani, pointing at each with his finger. The hotels looked gigantic in the illumination of the electric lights that burned wastefully everywhere in the streets.

The automobile continued to dance on its four wheels as it made a second turn on a winding street and then into another long straight road, lined with pretty houses on both sides.

“This is the Boulevard Mussolini,” Gani said; “and that is our house.”

The engine stopped before a passage at the end of which a big gate stood ajar. Inside the threshold, the family received us with open arms and words of welcome.

“Mir se erdhet, mir se erdhet! Mir se vini, mir se vini!” the welcome resounded everywhere. All the neighbors had come out to greet us in their strange dialect.

White bread, fried meat balls, fried eggs with still-sizzling big pieces of cheese on the side, and rice pudding were served to us as soon as the family had commiserated with Hano and me over our mother’s death.

But there was no time to dip a second piece of bread in the yolk of the egg; guests were announced by the excited flock of children.

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It was late, the clock said nine, but the neighbors had made an exception to their bed-time habit. They had to come and console my sister and me.

“Long life to your father, and may your brother live to be a hundred,” each murmured softly, as I kissed the hands of perhaps fifty women, one after another. Here they did not kiss me as ladies in Valona did: they merely touched their cheeks to mine three times. Then all sat down.

The room was large and painted in peach color, with garlanded borders of ivy in green and blue. On three sides of the square room a continuous couch provided seats for the guests, who looked like a string of beads in assorted colors.

A round table in the center, with a heavily-embroidered spread, held the bust of Skanderbeg and piles of ashtrays. Another table at the end, a chest on the opposite side, a dozen brown lustrous chairs, a large carpet that showed no particle of the floor, embroidered cushions everywhere, and heavily embroidered curtains half hidden by heavy red drapes, furnished the most luxurious guest room that I had ever seen in my life.

When the guests had gone, the house grew calmer except for the cries of the seven children in the family who had not yet gone to sleep.

“Let us go to bed,” Ismet ordered. I could see that Hano’s brother-in-law was the authority, especially

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when he added in his emphatic voice: "Nexhmo is to kiss no more dirty hands of women with diseases—and you had better stop that weeping custom when women come to console you, for your eyes have suffered enough."

II

The next morning, I was standing out in the balcony before the family was up. I leaned on the decorated railings and hoisted on the tips of my feet as waves of joy almost carried my heart away.

Here were no waves to sing, no Adriatic to look at in its calm splendor, no trees to whisper, no sweet songs of birds, no crocuses and violets and daisies to spring from the ground out of their own will. There was no grass, except tiny patches now and then, but there were roads paved with cement and streets lined with small round pebbles.

The beauty amid which I had grown in Krip was gone, but neither did I weep for it. With the death of my two dearest ones, I wanted to brush away all these last memories.

I was no more a child; I was grown up, ready to learn, ready to show the world that I was Sherife's daughter.

"I shall become—like my mother and—" Oh, but my foolish thoughts!

SHERIFE'S DAUGHTER

It was a new awakening, a new joy to find myself in this land of the North. I leaned farther over the iron balustrades and inhaled the new air and enjoyed the passers-by who sang at early sun-dawn. The noise of passing motor cars, the howls of dogs, the donkeys complaining of their heavy loads by "hi-ho-ing" at each other as they met, delighted me.

Below in the courtyard the family stood in groups, some busy with their morning tasks, others weeping and whining for no reason at all that I could see. I had never lived in a big family, though it is a general custom in my country and is followed by all my relatives. Brothers never separate but spend their lives together, their families lodged under one roof.

When it was lunch time, I found that there were more guests in the house besides me. We sat around the one-foot-high sofra, young and old together.

The guests, some of them old, looked with ugly faces at the children, who refused to eat the soup because they wanted to begin first with the cake. Dhurata, my two-year-old niece, banged her spoon against the sofra; all the children joined in.

"Discipline, discipline!" the old father-in-law of my sister shouted from the head of the sofra where he sat with crossed legs. But how can a mother discipline her children when half a dozen guest children are present?

As I sat next to my sister, I threw a glance at the

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flock that crowded the dinner table densely all around.

There was Vahide, my sister's younger sister-in-law, with her two daughters, Firdes (just my age) and Sabahat. Vahide was a widow, hardly twenty-nine, and had come to spend the rest of her life at her brother's home. There was Hano, the only bride in the family, for Ismet never had married. There was Eqrem, the youngest brother-in-law, sitting beside his father with his head high like a deer. There was Mersin Efendi, Hano's eighty-three-year-old father-in-law, who had been living there for two and a half years, and his young wife Teto-Ado, who had arrived unannounced from Libohova that same morning. While waiting for the soup to come, she told us that her stay would be rather brief. "I may stay this summer and the season of the fall and winter months, and perhaps by the end of next spring I will have to go."

"But you just came, Teto-Ado. Don't mention your leaving so soon," Hano intervened, so as to be hospitable to her half-mother-in-law.

"My chickens and cows need me—but I will come back soon, for I can feel how good the air is here," Teto-Ado replied, lowering her eyes to the sofa.

No one commented except Tahire, who smiled under her lip. Tahire was the elder sister-in-law of Hano. Although she lived there in Tirana, she, too, had come to

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spend some months at her brother's home; her health had run down lately. Only Hano knew how to take good care of her and her three undisciplined daughters, so she had come to recuperate at no expense. Why should the advantage be wasted when there was a bride in the house?

Secho also had come with his two daughters, but just for a brief visit of ten or thirty days. He deserved hospitality because he was the uncle of the midwife who had received Gani and Ismet into the world.

Hano even had to press the tcharchaffs of these women guests who sat all day with hands folded in their laps. For hospitality prescribed that as visitors we sit and watch the hostesses wait on us all day and until late at night.

The old women sat by the fire-place, though it was summer, since that is considered the place of honor in the room. Teto-Ado, in particular, counted the beads on her rosary and constantly prayed to Father God:

“Allah yarabi, grant us health and love—and mercy—mercy to this world where modernism is stamping down the walls of honor and hospitality and the old devotion we had for each other. . . .”

I often looked with sympathy at Hano, for I knew too well what an added problem I was to her.

According to Ismet's orders, Firdes and I were to

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wear no black headkerchiefs to show we were in mourning. Our black dresses were replaced with bright prints of summer material.

We were privileged to go out into the streets alone, but every time we prepared to go anywhere, Vahide advised: "See that no man speaks to you, don't twist your waists when you walk, and—be—careful—not—to—laugh in the streets."

"Ismet Efendi says we are going to be modern," I cut in.

"If you two are so much enchanted about this insanity of modernism, we shall veil you before six months are up," the gentle mother of Firdes replied.

III

On the following day, with Gatine, the housemaid, chaperoning us, Firdes and I were allowed to go out for a promenade.

With Gatine at our side, we marched along the boulevard arm in arm, swinging our shoulders to right and left, elegantly. Passers-by looked at us curiously; native men grinned to see us dressed in the indecent modern clothes which we wore—dresses short to the cup of the knee, and our belts tied low on the hips.

Of course we paid no heed to the eyes of strangers, but looked instead at the toes of our own feet.

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"Oei Goca, do you want to go to the Café Tomori?" our servant suggested, and we two did not ponder over our reply. Firdes had to warn Gatine not to tell the family where we were going, and at the same time she created an alibi to tell them when we returned home.

The music of the gypsy orchestra greeted us from far. Inside the wooden railings of the café was a large circle of men, while in the center the gypsies danced and played.

The white faced men of Tirana, who are great lovers of frolic and songs, perched on wooden chairs in all sorts of poses; some had even managed to sit cross-legged—others wiggled restlessly; it seemed they did not enjoy these modern seats.

Raki and appetizers of pickles and fried liver occupied the tables before them. Waiters with rolled-up sleeves replaced the emptied glasses of raki with others filled to the very brim with the native liquor.

One man twisted his black moustache with pleasure, another old man banged his fist against the table as the rest joined in the rhythmic merriment of the gypsy entertainers by clapping their hands.

In the center, the gypsies danced gracefully to the monotonous beat of the music. They stamped their feet in rhythm, twisted their waists, and looked at the men capriciously, only to make the clapping of hands louder. The fiddle, the clarionet, and the tamburella screamed

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the songs in shrill pitch. It intoxicated the men. They forgot their dignity and joined the gypsies in the dance, whirling unsteadily around and around.

Everything was at a climax, with the thunder of shouts and songs deafening to the ear, when suddenly the music and merriment stopped. The crowd in the ring drew back. On the ground lay one of the gypsies. Blood streamed down her beautiful face.

A tall man, revolver in hand, stood near the dead gypsy. There was no expression on his face until he raised his right hand and once more fired at the girl who lay dead before him. Then he relaxed but still did not move. The crowd screamed, loud shrieks were let out from all sides, but no one moved.

Four policemen appeared behind the armed man and carried the criminal away, while excitement doubled and a curious hubbub arose among the crowds.

Word of the episode soon spread. The dead gypsy was really a gentile, all said. She was the lawful wife of a mountaineer, and the criminal was her husband.

“His wife! Blessed may his hand be!” many cried to each other dramatically.

“Blessed be his name. He restored the honor of his family and his town. And he gave himself up with no attempt to escape—not a word of defense!” women push-pushed to each other from under their fresches.

“Qyqa! all these scandals taking place near the

mosque," another put in. "What days we are living to see."

Gendarmes, officials, police, and government men from the city filled the grounds. The large audience scattered on all sides, most running away so as not to be seen—and so did we.

"Will they hang him?" Firdes questioned our gypsy servant, who had knowledge of everything.

"I don't know these new laws," she said, "but they have no right even to whip him. He had to kill her, for how else could he restore the honor and good name of his family and town? Killing for honor is no crime, law or no law," she emphasized in her dialect. "Besides, a man has the right to do what he wishes with his own wife. Dancing in public is fit for gypsies, oei zonya, not for gentiles."

"You are right," we sighed.

We walked homewards arm in arm, with Gatine marching behind us in her wooden shoes that clicked loudly on the cobbled streets.

It was late afternoon now, and Mount Dajti was catching the last light of the sun. All the men of Tirana were out promenading, most of them in groups that formed a long line as they marched up and down the principal avenue. It was Sunday, the newly-established holiday. Business men and officials were all out breathing the cool air.

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There were women here and there who promenaded with men. The Austrian general who was head of our army walked slowly with his wife hanging on his arm. She talked and laughed with her uniformed husband as if she were a man. And there were other foreign women, dressed in elegant clothes and large-brimmed hats. We marveled at their beauty, whispered to each other how fortunate they were, and again hurried our feet onward.

Mohammedan women clad in black tcharchaffs passed along with quick steps, holding one or two children by the hand. The youngsters overpowered the street with their loud yells, as their mothers half dragged them by the arm.

Here and there a man or two in modern dress promenaded the squares. These men, dressed in blue and white and gray suits cut in French fashion, were Tosks, men from the South, officials of the new government headed by Ahmet Zogu. They walked along with hands clasped behind; on their solemn faces one could see the heavy weight of responsibility they carried. Theirs was the great responsibility of struggling to revive a long-forgotten nation. But little impression did they make, though, on the native Maloks, who looked at them with distrust. The Ghegs of the North trusted but the gun and themselves. They did not put much confidence in these peace-seeking men of Gegeria who were being friendly with foreign nations—with foreigners who,

until yesterday, were enemies of Albania, and who were sticking their teeth in each other's throats today.

IV

We returned home from a visit late one afternoon to find the children at the peak of excitement, as if a carnival was about to come.

"Nexhmo, Firdes, the landlord's wives have invited us all to their matem party tonight, and oh! they are cooking such big pots of pudding," they all ran hastily to tell us all at once.

"And Halla is squeezing baskets and baskets of lemons for lemonade."

"Are we all going?" I asked with a bit of interest, for it was my first chance to go to a party of this sort since the days of my childhood.

"Yes, all and all, by Allah! The landlord has invited the men, too," Besnik answered with a pleased expression, for he was now eight and naturally placed himself in the category of men.

Until the clock said eight that evening, at which hour we were to go to the party-gathering of matem, the children did not know what to do with their impatience. As a result, doors banged, cheeks were slapped, the girls' braids were pulled, and the windows slammed closed and open for the sake of mere pleasure.

Then, among the jolly laughter and games, the melody of crying began, for the children were being dragged unwillingly to eat their evening meal. Firdes, too, was weeping hysterically, for Teto-Ado had discovered her toothbrush hung above the sink, and had used it to scrub her ancient rings with. Teto-Ado felt no speck of guilt because she had used Firdes's toothbrush to scrub mouldy jewelry.

"Brushes are made to wash things clean with, not to scrub the inside of your mouth. You have taken a little too much to modern ways, my niece, and you know that men do not like that," she scolded, after the rings were cleaned bright and shiny.

But time for the party came, and like a flock of sheep we headed for the landlord's house. We reached the room through a tiny cellar gate because the court in front of the house was filled with men.

At the head of the stairs, the two sturdy wives of the landlord and his widowed sister welcomed us formally, touching the tips of their noses and their foreheads again and again as each of us, sixteen in all, passed before them. Then we were led into the one gigantic room which Ghegs use for all occasions. They cook and sleep in it, receive guests there, and celebrate the weddings of their children and grandchildren.

A deafening noise of laughter and the talking of women filled the dimly lighted hangar-like room; it

was intolerable at first, but soon my ears became accustomed to it, as all ears do. We were honored to sit on the upper end of the room where a dozen chairs were placed in a straight row. Special attention was given to us, for the Ghegs of the North considered Tosks like us a little their superiors, since we had been to school and learned how to read and write. Besides, we were strangers in this northern land, and therefore to be treated as guests in whatever home we went.

The Ghegs called us modernized Tosks because we no longer wore big rolls of pantaloons, and had taken to wearing skirts instead. And now we had to sit on chairs, for how could one flop on the ground with crossed legs when the narrowness and shortness of the skirt allowed no space?

All were Ghegs in the party but for us, who perched self-consciously at the head of the room. Before us, young brides, mothers, old women, and many more very old women sat cross-legged and chattered around the room with the greatest animation. The elderly ladies wore plain outfits in black or brown, but the younger, on whose luxury my eyes feasted, looked like flowers swaying to and fro on a field. To put it gently, not all of them were pretty, but have you ever seen ugliness on a happy face?

Over their hair, they wore silk kerchiefs fringed with lace, and with little gold coins hung at each corner.

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Their braids were hidden under their shami, for Ghegs consider it a sin to let the braids fall loose on the back. Their hair looked like shiny red velvet; a strip of the red henna even reached to the skin on the upper part of the forehead, where the hair grows its last roots. Their eyebrows were red too, and their finger-nails and the palms of their hands.

Beneath their exquisite sleeveless vests which glimmered with gold thread and daisies embroidered of pearls and sequins, the collars and sleeves of their silk blouses drooped with the weight of the embroidery in gold.

Their pantaloons were white, made with thirty yards of snow-like organdy. Lucky were the young brides who walked so majestically inside them.

“Firdes, could you walk so gracefully if you were wearing those pantaloons?” I turned to ask my friend with pleased amusement.

“It isn’t hard to walk, but you can’t sit down on them,” replied my friend, who had seen them before at weddings.

“I wonder how they can put on their veils over them and walk home,” I said, while my eyes marveled at these Northern women who to me looked like exquisite balloons.

“They take them off at the end of the party, and their gypsy servants carry them home in clothes baskets. Have you not noticed now and then a veiled woman

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passing by in the street, and her servant following her, carrying a big basket on her head?"

Then my eyes rested on their feet. Not one of the brides wore shoes or stockings. Their luxury ended at their ankles; their feet were wide, flat, dusty, and cracked like mud in a hot sun from the severe colds of past winters and the mud of the streets. The men of Tirana already wore shoes, but the women never, at that time.

Now the multicolored brides gave us soup spoons with which to eat hashure from vast round copper trays that were placed here and there throughout the room. Each one stretched her hand in turn to scoop out a spoonful of the pudding and rush it to her mouth before someone hit her elbow by accident and caused the contents of the spoon to land on her lap.

The hashure was good in taste and smell, for many were the spices and fruits in it: corn, wheat, beans, peas, dates, raisins, almonds, chick-peas, pistachios, orange peel, dried apple, sugar, cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, butter, cornstarch, water, and a few more ingredients, I am sure, were added to make that pudding. It had cooked for two days and a night over a slow fire, and six Mohammedan hodjas had blessed the hashure with prayers from the Koran while it was still cooking.

Good as hashure tastes, it can never be eaten before it has been blessed with holy words. It is made only once

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a year, for the day when Mohammedans of the Bektashi sect break their fast, which we call matem. This fasting is not like that of my father's sect, who for thirty days eat nothing during the day until sunset, when they can feast on all foods and drinks whatever.

Bektashis, on the contrary, can eat at any time and at all hours, but for sixteen days they can pour no drop of water into their mouths. Their matem is a waterless fast, during which period they fade and wrinkle like a picked flower dropped on a road.

"I like the hashure, oy Firdes, but not the matem," I turned to say to my friend. "I am glad my father is not a Bektashi."

"Don't say that, because my grandfather was one—and I am glad he was, because he is in Heaven now," she replied, hurt in her feelings.

"Really?—he really was?"

"Didn't you know it? He died from the result of the matem. He grew too weak with fasting, and could not fight off a bad cold last summer," my friend explained.

"What did he eat during matem, do you remember?" I questioned with rising interest.

"Oh, he ate very salty bread and roast corn and cheese and olives, but of course he ate no meat, for Bektashis are not supposed to. Sometimes he had vegetables, but most of the time he took just very salty bread."

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“But why did he?” I asked.

“Because it is believed that the more sufferings you impose to your own body during those days, the better it will be for your soul,” Firdes explained patiently. “But the worst part of all was the little square closet in the cellar inside which he spent the two whole weeks in darkness, unable to move or stretch out.”

“But why?” I interrupted.

“Because that was part of the matem sufferings which he practised.”

“Do all Bektashis shut themselves in dark closets down in cellars, moy Firdes? I never heard of it.”

“Oh, no, not all. Only people who are very strict,” Firdes corrected at once.

“Qyqa, Qyqa!” the voices of women overwhelmed the clatter of the spoons and the sipping of sweet lemonade; once more a loud, energetic conversation began.

Some ten or twelve old women who sat in a circle not far from us had started a long and hearty gossiping.

“Qyqa! The crow, how could she do it!” I heard one of them say, beating her knees with her palms.

“Eh, it is the fault of this new law,” exclaimed another sadly.

“But how did it begin?” questioned a third, straightening up with anxiety. Firdes and I, too, were listening, secretly, while we pretended to be watching the general scene.

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"I don't know, but my neighbors who saw the mother-in-law and bride fighting together say that all the blame is on the bride although the mother began the argument."

"But then for what is she a mother-in-law? Why did she marry off her son—in order to smile at his bride all the time?" said one ironically.

"What happened next, oy wife of Selim?"

"Well, the mother landed one or two slaps on the bride and told her that she was not worthy of her husband's good name."

"And then?"

"And then, believe me as you believe the words of the Koran, the bride drew off her right shoe and threw it straight on the left temple of her mother-in-law—right here, where the brain lies."

"Oh, oh, for the black shame of the world!" they all gasped.

Firdes pressed my foot, but I was listening with all my ears.

"And the husband has not yet divorced his bride?" asked one, knitting her eyebrows.

"No, mi pra, he can't," replied the first.

"What, he still keeps that female under his roof and eats and sleeps with her?" the former again inquired, tugging at the flabby skin of her cheeks with surprise.

"Don't you know—haven't you heard of this new

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law that the King has passed? Why, a man can't even control his wife any more."

"Who told you?" asked the three at once.

"My son, mi pra; he read it to me page by page."

"Qyqa, it is not worth while to bring up and marry a son any more! Not if you can't expect to enjoy a little authority over your son's bride—no, by Allah and by that food!"

"But can't the husband divorce his wife even if she disobeys and knocks the head off her husband's mother with the heel of her shoe? How can it be?" questioned another worriedly.

"Not even if the bride is caught leaning out of the street window and watching men strangers that pass by!" answered the first one with a downcast expression.

"But how long will this law last?" another questioned.

"For ever, mi pra, for ever—at least, as long as I live and as long as the King lives. He is writing more laws, and more and more every day."

"What, more besides the law for wives?" a cynical-looking old woman in the group asked with a deep voice.

"Yes, mi pra, that is what people who can read books say. His Majesty wants all officials to wear hats instead of fezes. All newly-built houses are to be whitewashed on the outside. And girls are to go to school, for they

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must learn how to read and write—as if we ever missed anything in the world because we don't know how to scribble lines on paper and read words out of the pages of books! But His Majesty is the King, and kings know best," she ended, relieving her chest with a sigh.

v

"Allahu Ekbeer—Alla—aa—hu—Ekbeer—"

A rippling tune like that of heavenly bells or like the sound of running water, a sound more beautiful than any instrument, rang through the sweet serenity of the early dawn.

I awoke from a pleasant dream which had carried me back to Krip, over the hills where Sadik with his sheep was descending to the fields; the beloved shepherd playing his flute as he walked behind his flock.

I raised my head from the pillow and looked around me with sleepy eyes. For a moment I thought it was Father whom I heard singing the morning call to prayer. But no, he was far away.

"Father, too, must be up by now, and kneeling on his tiger skin," I thought to myself. "He is singing the same melody, the same words. . . ."

But oh, a sigh escaped my breast, a new thought came to my mind! Father was not alone!

The previous day we had received news that Father

had married. He had chosen a wife from Gjirokastra, as Mother had said. A young wife, too.

I rubbed my eyes and forehead with both hands and again listened to the melody.

“Ala-le-i-sala—” I continued to follow the words as they crept through the closed door opposite my bed. The deep, soft voice of Mersin Efendi penetrated my longing heart. I wondered why Firdes, who slept beside me, had not wakened to listen to her grandfather’s beautiful prayer. But she slept soundly, her face deep in the pillow.

“Goo—goo—ftoo,” a mourning dove sang from somewhere outside. A couple replied to it, and then from the open windows more melodies invaded the room.

From the minaret of the mosque across the street, Afez-Ali, the Mohammedan hodja, sang the morning call to prayer. Others were heard, near and far, from the six other minarets. They chanted a choir of blessings to the city that slept in peace below. They blessed the earth, its people, and my little country who once more was a free nation, resting under the wings of freedom. And as I sat in the middle of my bed, I hoped that they would not forget to bless my sister and Gani for not having left me behind to live in a house with my stepmother. “Lucky Firdes, that your mother will not marry,” I said soundlessly, as I turned to look at my playmate who slept undisturbed.

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Oh, but she did not know. Firdes would perhaps leave Tirana soon, to return to the dry mountains of Libohova and remain there for ever. On the previous night, I had overheard Hano and Vahide Harieni discuss the prospect of Firdes's marriage. A young widower from Libohova had sent a letter to Ismet, proposing to have Firdes for his wife; and he wanted an early answer because he had three children to be taken care of.

"Shall I tell, or should I not tell?" I asked myself again and again. "Allah, let no one come forth to propose for me, too," I murmured as the insane idea came to my head.

A mosquito had entered the mosquito net. It buzzed round and round my left ear until I could bear it no more, and unconsciously I clapped my hands in an effort to catch it. Instead, I frightened Firdes from her sleep.

"What is the matter, moy Nexhmo?"

"I cannot sleep," I replied dully, as I lowered my head to the pillow. "Besides, I have something to tell you, Firdes."

"A dream?"

"No. They are making arrangements to marry you," I replied calmly.

"Who told you, moy Nexhmo? I hope you are joking with me!"—and she jumped up with fright.

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"Tomorrow, tell your mother that you will not marry a widower—do you hear me? Modern girls have some rights, and they see the photograph of the man before they say yes to their marriage; and don't forget we are modern, too."

"But how can I speak of marriage to my mother, moy Nexhmo? Where did you hear this news, anyway?"

"From the mulberry tree. They were talking about it for an hour yesterday."

"Oh, oh, miserable crow that I am," Firdes exclaimed as her deep brown eyes filled with tears.

A few days passed, but no more news reached my ear. Firdes lived in agony, waiting for the end. We could see the elders in the family holding secret conferences, but who would dare to approach or ask what went on?

Late one evening my gentle sister broke the news to Firdes, as we sat embroidering bed-cushions intended for the hope chest.

"Firdes, they almost engaged you, but you escaped it this time," she said. "The new law demands that girls cannot be wed before they are eighteen now."

"Rofte Shqiperia!—Three cheers for Albania!" I screamed, throwing my handkerchief in the air.

"Don't shout, for the family will hear you, Nexhmo. And don't get so excited, for Firdes shall wear a veil

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from now on, and that will bring to an end your plowing together through the streets of Tirana. You are not a boy—you know that."

"I am not a boy, but I am not going to wear a veil so soon either. There are girls older than me who don't wear veils, and I am . . ."

"But I thought you wanted to be veiled," Sister cut in.

"I will tear it in strips if you hand me a veil. I know this was your idea. You told Meto that I need a veil, but I won't wear one."

Firdes and Hano were amused at my painful protests.

"And I will not marry!—keep that in your mind," I stormed at Hano.

"No one has proposed for you, anyway," my sister replied, a little angry at my shameless manner. "And if you go on being wild like this, no boy's mother will choose you for her son, ever."

"Keep in mind not to engage me while I am in high school, for if you do, I will drown myself in the waters of the Adriatic."

"You had better take the courage to warn your father of that. Marrying you will be his business," Hano replied, getting still more angry.

The sound of a gun shot from outside put us to si-

lence. We ran to the balcony, and in a few moments all the family was out.

“What can it be, a revolution?” Hano questioned in fear, for not long ago the last uprising had begun in the same manner.

“Zjar, zjar,” men shouted in the street below as they ran toward the center of the city.

Soon a red patch masked the starry sky toward the city’s center. The crackling of fire overpowered the cries of the people, and soon the flames became visible.

“It is our hotel,” Gani cried in fear, and like the wind he fled into the street. Ismet followed, and after him Mersin Efendi in his white cambric night-gown and the white cap which made him look like a ghost. Besnik awoke from sleep and secretly awoke all his little mates to watch the city in flames. For that was how it looked from my sister’s balcony.

“Shkolla Teknike, Shkolla Teknike,” we heard people cry in the street.

Hano and I froze at the sound of the words. It was the school where our brother was.

“The Merciful Allah is punishing us. It is the penalty of evils,” Teto-Ado murmured to herself from the window where she leaned comfortably.

“My brother may be caught in the fire!” Hano cried out suddenly, and flew down the staircase. Firdes and I

followed after her, and we fled into the street, all three dressed in an improper state to be seen.

"The boys may have been caught in the flames—my only brother," my sister cried with half breath. But then before us stood the shadows of three men. Gani and Ismet were returning, and with them was Mehmet.

"Meto!" we exclaimed, as we encountered our brother safely facing us.

"Where were you going, anyway?" Ismet asked with a scolding tone. Then he added: "I can see why these two lost their senses. But you, Firdes, why should you . . ." But Firdes had fled back upstairs.

I noticed Ismet Efendi looking silently after the fleeing Firdes. I wondered what mistake my playmate had committed, for I could see that her uncle wore an angry expression.

"I must go back and help again—our old dormitory is burning," Brother panted. "I came only to convince you that I was not roasted—good-night!"

Meto laughed, pulled off his hat in salute, and was gone.

We two sisters looked after our only brother with mixed glances of affection and longing, for Meto very seldom came to see us. There was a young girl in my sister's home, a girl of the age to marry; and Meto, being a young man of nineteen, was not supposed to step inside the home of my sister where Firdes lived.

Chapter IX

A STEPMOTHER'S BREATH

MEHMET and I were returning home. Brother had been offered a position in Valona, and therefore I, too, had to return home until my school opened.

As we drove into Durazzo from Tirana, a large crowd of children followed us along the way. Passers-by stopped to look at me, wondering who I was and what I was, since I was traveling without a veil and wore my hair short around the neck and ears.

"She must be Italianke," I heard a number of the spectators say.

"But Italians wear hats," replied a clever stranger to his two friends.

I felt out of place and in perfect confusion as I stood on the dock waiting for my brother, who had gone to the custom-house. Before leaving me to stand there, he had advised me not to look around but to gaze at the ground and speak to no one.

After another hour, we stepped down into row-boats which carried us to the big ship waiting some distance off shore.

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All day, Brother and I stood at the bow of the *Puglia*, letting our eyes wander over the blue waters and the gray mountains in the distance. Neither of us spoke, and neither thought of lunch when midday came and went. My brother, too, it seemed, was drowned in bitter thoughts, visualizing our return home to find a stranger in our mother's place.

"Meto, why did you have to take me back to Vlora? Father won't let me go to high school. I know it, for my heart tells me so," I finally said to my brother, in a choking voice.

Meto embraced me affectionately and tried to convince my trembling heart that I would go to school.

"Only try to obey that—that—wife of our father as long as you are home," he said, looking down at the foamy water.

Not until now were we getting acquainted as brother and sister, for I had seen very little of him during the past seven years.

"I will fulfil every wish you ask," he went on, "for I promised that to Mana. Only—you must try to obey this stepmother of ours. I don't remember, but I think Hano said that you are sharp-tongued when you are angry, and there's nothing I can do to help you about that."

At the hour of sunset, the ship whistled three times,

the motor stopped, and the anchor plunged into the depth of the sea. We had come to Valona.

When we landed on the dock, Father was there to receive us with nothing to say but a few words of welcome. Meto and I bowed, kissed his hand respectfully, and stepped into the carriage. More eyes, more curiosity; but this time I paid no heed to the crowded seaport where, as I knew, men came every sunset-time for nothing but to breathe the wholesome air. The carriage drove away with us, the horses galloping rhythmically.

"What happened to your mother's jewelry?" Father asked all of a sudden. A lump choked my breath; it was fright mingled with anger.

"Mana gave it to me before she died. If you wish to know, Mana has left a message for your wife to wear nothing of her belongings," I said.

"I asked you what happened to the jewelry and to half of the house furniture. There are things missing in the house; what did you do with them?" he spoke emphatically.

"Ask your new wife for the furniture. The jewelry I left in Tirana."

"You little destroyer!" Father retorted, flushing with anger. But this last comment I did not understand.

We reached our home village, the team stopped before our house, and we stepped out without another

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word. It was the same house; the same fields surrounded my home; but a strange hush lay over all the once-jolly and melodious Krip that I remembered.

Did the birds come no more to make conversation at their meeting place? The willows looked lonely and friendless.

At the open gate appeared a young woman, repeating words of welcome to Brother and me.

She was a woman not more than thirty, clad in rosy pink after the gayest bridal fashion. Two artificial braids of extraordinary length hung down before her shoulders; her face was painted in white cosmetic, the eyebrows lengthened with burnt almond. Could this be my father's wife—and he sixty-two years old? I could not imagine how Father had allowed such elaboration, when I knew that my mother had dressed simply even on her wedding day. Reddened cheeks and penciled eyebrows had always been his capital dislike. "But perhaps second wives don't obey their husbands," I concluded to myself.

II

All went well for a time. Father worked hard in the office, and when he was at home in the evenings he read or sang. During the first few days, Meto wept in hysterics now and then as if he were not a man; but his first job after graduation brought him joy and new hopes.

As for me, I spoke little to anyone and tried to obey my stepmother. I had shed no tears before anyone's face; only my own pillow knew how I wept as I lay in my bed at night.

But when the heat of the August month began to drop more and more, my stepmother's attitude toward me began to ferment. Every morning I awoke to find all the housework done and my stepmother sitting out in the balcony, making lace for new headkerchiefs. The floors were swept, the staircase mopped, and the couches and beds made. In the kitchen, the lunch had been cooked while I perhaps was still snoring, and now the food for supper was cooking on the fire. For a score of days I wondered if it were a new fashion to cook the evening meal at seven in the morning. Could it be a modern style imported from Europe recently, and that I knew nothing of? Or was it a habit with the women of Gjirokastra, my stepmother Selfische's home? Gjirokastra, I knew, was famous for producing the most economical and the neatest housewives of any town in Albania.

As for Selfische, cleanliness was her mania. And a ruinous gift it was, because the new housewife of my father believed in boiling every article in "ash water," lye solution, which is strong enough to harm the boiling pot itself.

I discovered that more than half the things which be-

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longed in the house were missing, and that what remained there had all been transformed into a shameful state. My heart and eyes wept to see my mother's things all a mass of run-together colors and deformed shapes. The beautiful quilts, mattresses, rugs, which could never be replaced, the silk bed sheets, and all else had been boiled in ash water over the fire—ash water, the native suds for washing plain linen.

“Moy Teto, what have you done to the mattresses?” I took the courage to ask her one day. “All the things seem to look ruined.”

“I have cleaned them to proper shape,” she retorted, her eyes examining her finger-nails as she always did when angry. “I have my way of doing things, and I will do them as I please.”

“But there are things missing from the rooms, moy Teto. I don't see many of the guest mattresses left, and the red-and-white carpet of the living room is gone.”

“What things? I don't know; you gave them away before you left with your sister,” she told me with a perfectly cool manner.

It was as if the house roof had fallen on my head. *I* had given my mother's things away? Was that why Father had called me “destroyer of his home,” when angry at me? And Father believed all this?

“You gave them away to your relations in Vlora and to poor friends! And you told my father that I gave

them away—I know, the neighbors told me. You gave them away because you could not boil them all twice a year. You have bewitched my father, as the neighbors are saying. You have come here only on purpose to inherit his wealth, shame to Gjirokastra that made you!" I stormed in hysterics, blowing out of my chest everything that had piled up inside. My stepmother sat calmly tickling the cat with her knitting needle.

What followed was a blow for me because, when my father had been notified of what I had said, he spoke to me but little, and twice repeated that no son's father would choose me to keep house for his boy, now that all Vlora had heard of my conduct. No more could I sit on my father's lap and play with his black curls as I had done all my life. I had been my father's favorite child, and my wishes had always ruled him, but now all had changed. That, I told myself, is why the proverb says, "A girl without a mother is like the night without a moon."

I had lost my way and my father's love. I was called "destroyer of his home"—a title of which I never succeeded in clearing myself.

"Tirana made you worse, anyhow. I can't let you go to high school." Father gave the blow of news to me one day; I had given away the furniture of my home, and so I was to be punished.

It is truly said, "The tongue breaks no bones but its

words break mountains." My tongue had broken the hope of my life, wiping out the happiness of my heart's desire.

And now it was that my stepmother learned of the famous bazube which my mother had possessed: a prayer roll which had performed many miracles for women who bore no children, and for many females whose souls had been haunted by evil spirits. The bazube, it was said, had never failed to bring them remedy. My great-grandmother had found it among the ruins of a fallen wall, during a war, in some part of Smyrna. Ever since, it had been handed freely to people who were in need of it.

Of course, most women in Valona knew of the bazube. Females have a keen memory for gossip or information of such a kind. And now, as I sat one day in a far corner of our next-door neighbor's living room, I overheard what the six women were saying who surrounded my stepmother by the hearth.

"Yes, yes, wife of Mustafa Efendi, the bazube must be somewhere in the house. Find it at once and wear it under your right shoulder day and night. By that sun outside, you will get results from it," one said.

"Right she is," another added, shaking her head emphatically. "I know, for the bride of my third cousin's sister-in-law had a child after seventeen years of marriage. The bazube did it, by that Allah who watches

from above." The conversation continued while I listened with an ear from my distant corner.

"I hope Allah gives you a bit of a boy soon, wife of Mustafa Efendi. It will make your Efendi happy, too, in his old age."

"Amen, amen; honey and sugar in your words," Selfische repeated gratefully. "I have tried everything on earth," she continued, "but the Merciful does not heed. That well-known dervish who came from Mecca told me the whole truth. He said that the mother of my former husband bewitched me, soul and body."

"Wa, Waa!" her friends exclaimed, beating their knees in surprise; "but why, why, moy wife of Mustafa Efendi?"

"Because that husband of mine paid attention to me in the presence of the family, and his mother could not stand it any longer. The dervish told me that her witchery has blighted me, body and soul. He told me that I had been given haunted earth in coffee, and that a witch has tied some threads of my hair in a bird's nest."

"Wa, waa, korbaaa! The dirty black crow!"

"The only remedy for me is to cross three seas and walk on forty-one crossroads, but where can I find all those seas and crossroads? She then bewitched her own son not to love me, until at last she made me leave the house after seventeen years of childless marriage."

"Korba, korba, the old crow! But anyhow the day has

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come for you to free your body of these evils. Just go home and find the bazube and wear it on you day and night."

"I will, I will find it right this evening—I think I saw it somewhere in the house," my stepmother said to her friends.

I could hear no more of what was being said, for the window shutters rattled loudly in the noon wind outside. I rose tactfully, so as not to arouse suspicion, and from a window in another room I jumped on to our balcony.

I dashed into the house, my heart beating furiously. With shaking hands, I searched through every closet and chest, looking for the bazube of my mother.

"I will burn it, by Allah! I will burn it," I repeated insanely.

III

The showers of the early fall polished the fields and plains of Krip. Late-summer flowers and green clover spiced the earth with their fragrance and smiled in the sunshine, making the season next beautiful to spring. The sandy hills of the Sahara before the Adriatic still glittered from the hot rays of the golden sun. Yet who was to enjoy them? The men, our fathers, remained in their offices from morning to sunset, calculating figures on registers, and puffing cigarettes, and sighing over this

sorrow and that sorrow that had befallen them. The women sat in their homes and wept, lamenting and wearing black, mourning their dear ones. For Makbule Hanem had died, giving birth to twins; and there had been other catastrophes besides.

Only for my stepmother, life remained a joy. Little she cared for the ill-luck of neighbors; for she was a bride, and brides are not to be sad or melancholy if they can help it. Teto, as I called her, spoke little and spent more of her time in vanity and lace crocheting. Her headkerchiefs bore heavy fringes of lace in assorted colors of pink, red, and yellow; and the kerchief itself was of bright silk in lavender and purple.

My days, however, dragged away slowly, one day bringing nothing livelier to reduce the gloominess of another. How heavy, how bitter was sorrow when Mana was no more near to embrace me. . . . "Yes, yes, I know," I thought silently; "I know that I must not forget to love and respect Teto, for she is my father's wife." Yet my thoughts lingered no more with pleasure in the Krip of my childhood. The time was nearing for schools to open; and there remained little hope for me to leave home again, now that I had returned.

My brother, to whom I looked for love and rescue, came home but once a week or on holidays from Vlora, where he worked as a mechanical engineer.

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loons and simple shoes made of goatskin. On her graceful shoulders, she once had loaded wood from the forest and carried big jars of water from the spring.

Now she wore dresses with graceful lines, shoes lifted on high heels, and stockings that were transparent to the eye. Her face was a lamp through which glowed pale light; a beautifully-modeled nose she had, like that of one of the Greek goddesses. Her lips were generous and the mouth wide; her laughter, escaping through parted white teeth, was like the peal of little bells. I still wonder where she learned how to laugh so gracefully. A haunting glance burned in her blue eyes, searching, perhaps, for happiness beyond her destined misfortune.

Customs, costumes, habits, and traditions are of as many sorts in my country as wild flowers on a meadow. In Terbach it is the custom for fathers to engage their children from the time when they are infants. Fato, too, was engaged. Mürat Efendi had tied her life to the son of another farmer who possessed much wealth and an honorable ancestry.

But how contrasting, how unsuitable the young girl had grown since she had come to live in Krip, where she learned to dress and live according to town ways! Once or twice, Fato had taken courage and pleaded with her father to break her engagement-bond with the son of the farmer; but Mürat Efendi had given the word of

“besa”—the promise-oath which only death can break. “Besa,” to an Albanian, means more than a signed document, more than a legal code, more than a safe with forty padlocks.

Together, Fato and I crocheted laces, embroidered aprons and petticoats on the sewing machine; supplies for Fatime’s hope chest, they were. We took walks in the gardens and sat out in the balcony during sunset time, when the sea turned into silver, giving off a hundred multicolored rays.

But of such liberty my stepmother did not approve. I overheard one evening’s conversation:

“I thought someone proposed to have your daughter for his son! How do you allow this grown-up girl to go out undisguised and with her hair flying in all directions?” said my Teto coaxingly to Father, who sat reading beside the lamp.

“Yes, I know.”

“And she is telling all the neighbors that you are going to send her to another school. What are all these absurdities in this home?”

“Pooh, pooh!—yes. But I changed my mind,” he answered with half attention.

“Then veil her. It will be the only way to stop her talking to guards as if they were females and her equals. She ought to have been engaged by now, and ought to have most of her trousseau prepared. Bah, she thinks

only of schools, as if she were still in infancy. Schools are for boys who have to deal with the big world and with learned people, not for women," lectured my step-mother like an electric machine.

"You spoke the truth, Wife, but what can I do with her? I am not a woman to discipline females!" Father banged his book on the little desk beside him. "Xhemal Bey still wants her for his nephew, but who am I to give a goat of the mountains in marriage?"

"Then veil her. The tcharchaff will tame her manners."

"It isn't manners, it is her temper that needs taming," retorted Father angrily. But I was still angrier, outside the door where I stood listening. Yet what could I do? I was a girl and motherless.

Before I realized, black satin was purchased; the veil was cut, sewn, and folded all ready for me to wear.

I was sitting in my room one afternoon, watching the raindrops outside making music on the roof of the salt depot which stretched below my window. Through raindrops, I could picture Hiqmet and myself racing on the tilted roof as we had done once, while inside Mana paled with fear that we would fall.

My heart strayed out beyond the frames of the open window, thus thinking, when a voice called from inside. Father and his wife stood in the middle of the room, the latter holding a black bundle on her bowed arms.

"Here!—and take good care of it because satin is expensive," my father said as he half placed, half hurled the black bundle on my lap. I could see Teto standing still, her gaze watching me intently as if I were a dog with hydrophobia who might spring on her at any instant.

"What is this?" I asked, eyeing the black folds before me.

"Your veil. What did you expect, diapers?" said my father's wife, taking a step backward.

I could feel in the meantime the veins in my body racing their blood toward my head. I could hardly see the two before me, for everything turned black like the bundle on my lap. The black tcharchaff looked like a serpent coiled there to torture me. My hands clutched it, the fingers squeezed and tore at the silken folds, and with one quick lift the costly satin veil flew through the window and fell on the roof.

"Kalogre, your wrists need chains," cried the voice of my stepmother as I sat by the window with my gaze fixed outside. The rain was soaking my tcharchaff now with heavy streams.

"Kalogre, no one will want you for a wife," she scolded nervously; but Father placed himself calmly on the couch.

"You are not the one I blame, my child," said Father at last. "It is modernism. I shouldn't have let you go to

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Tirana. It is Meto who planted these insane modern thoughts into your empty head."

"Wild, I would call it—wild insanity," added Teto smartly.

"Eh, it seems we are destined to suffer and pay the penalty for the absurdities of our children." And he left the room with soft steps, as he had come.

I sat on the couch for many more hours afterwards, thinking and brooding about my own mishaps.

What had Mana meant when she said that I was brave? Would I go to high school, now that my tchar-chaff lay torn out in the rain? Would they make another veil for me? Ah, Meto knew nothing of what went on. "If he could only go back in Tirana, then I would insist on following him," I thought hopelessly. . . . Had I not dreamt three nights before that I was hanging washed laundry out on a clothes-line? And didn't old ladies say that that means traveling? Allah, why had Father turned against me; had his wife bewitched him with mesmerism as neighbors said? Did he turn against me because he thought I gave away the things of his house which once belonged to my mother? Or *was* I wild, and did I really need chains on my wrists? All these thoughts burned inside my head; and I had no one to tell my worries to, for the secrets of the home could not be told to outsiders. Not even to Fato. And Meto stayed in Vlora and was happy.

Besides, I preferred to endure my worries alone, for I had but one brother left. It would cost my heart more pain to see Meto troubled and unhappy because of me.

IV

Meto had been coming home to spend Saturdays and Sundays, but lately he had appeared two or three times on weekdays. "What can this mean?—I don't know!" but he looked well and happy—as happy as a mountain deer.

I noticed that he wore his blue suit more often; his shoes he now polished twice a week. In the morning he shaved with foams of soap and hot water before the looking glass; at noon he shaved again. Never before had I seen a man shave twice in twenty-four hours. To his black hair he applied a yellow paste; in his button hole, Meto wore a red carnation.

My brother walked in and out of the house, swinging his cane to north and south, and whistling "Ramona, Ramona . . . ?"

"Meto, why don't you teach me that song? I will sing it only when I am alone."

"I told you, girls are not supposed to sing love songs. Don't ask me again. . . . Oi Nexh, do you remember Seni in Tirana?" My brother looked up from his book, beaming with smiles now as if he saw a treasure.

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“Ehë, po—of course.”

“One of my school-mates married her. But do you know how?”

“No, tell me.”

“Hi-hi, ha-ha! the boy stole the girl away during a stormy night.”

“Vertet—really?”

“They ran off to Corfu and married there. And now they can’t imprison him for marrying the girl—so says the new law in Tirana. Good, isn’t it?”

“Po, po,” I replied. His eyes blazed with joy, though why I could not guess.

“Nexhmo, what will you do if I go away to Italy for some time?”

I turned with surprise, my heart beat fast, tears approached my eyelids.

“Why do you have to go?” I asked, forcing down a lump inside my throat.

“Oh, probably I will go to school, probably for something else.”

I still could not understand what was going on in my brother’s mind right there in Krip. The little community had raised plain trustworthy girls and boys who had been like sisters and brothers ever since I could remember. In Krip I had learned of games, the beauty of nature, animals, love, and now sorrow, but below these I seemed unable to look.

A STEP MOTHER'S BREATH

"Nexho, I am as happy as Omar Khayam," he told me one day.

"Po, po, yes, you should be," I replied absent-mindedly, assuming that Omar Khayam was one of his friends in Vlora.

For such was my acquaintance with books in those days. I was twelve then; I had read but two simple stories and one play. Books were for boys, so parents believed. A girl needed to know how to read and write a letter; that was all a girl needed.

Some days later, I was placing the clean shirts in my brother's suitcase, and, as curiosity often demanded, I explored it from top to bottom. A pile of typewritten sheets attracted my eye. Carefully I drew them out. "Rubairat ë Omar Khayamit," read the folder on top. What could it be? I sat before the suitcase in a comfortable position and began to read the typewritten sheets with much curiosity and haste.

Someone snatched the papers out of my hands. I raised my head at once, and smiled innocently upon discovering my brother.

"I have told you not to search my suitcases and pockets," he stormed angrily. Never did I receive such a spanking before, and never did I forgive my brother for thrashing me at such a time, when I was going through a bitter mental agony. The guilty punished the innocent for his sins!

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Never again had I the wish to read another line in a book—not as long as I remained in Krip.

v

It was an old custom of Krip for the officials to gather once or twice a year and, with songs and drinks, to spend an evening together out on the green lawn before the office.

The seven masters sat cross-legged on carpets and straw mats which had been spread on the green velvety ground. Around the ring there were kerosene lamps suspended on poles. Bottles, jugs, glasses, and plates of food occupied the circle inside. Guards walked to and fro, bringing new appetizers and cold fruit from the orchards to their feasting masters.

We children and young people, who had gathered out on the office balcony to watch our fathers drink and make merry, could smell the luscious fumes of roasting meat and fried cheese which the breeze carried away. The officials drank raki, laughed and joked, and stood up while they could to propose toasts to each other and the good fame of Krip.

The night was cool but pleasant, and the new breeze which rose from the sea below blew out the lamps of the feasters in the lawn. But there was light to shine

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over the heads of the merry men; there was the lamp of God in the sky to shine upon them, and millions of gold stars crowding the earth's dome.

The men broke into a melody; it was a new song which a lover had created recently. Our musical fathers sang it well. The melody poured beautifully out into the night, and the traveling breeze carried it far and wide. From trees and bushes, birds could hear it, animals of wild blood caught the music in their ears, cattle awoke in their tents. The melody touched the leaves of trees and petals of flowers; it touched, too, the hearts of young lovers if there were any to hear it.

Meto and Fatime were still sitting on the balcony, and I with them. All others had gone home to sleep, for it was long past midnight.

I yawned and sighed and rubbed my eyes nervously, but I still remained out on the balcony, sitting comfortably between my brother and Fato.

"Nexhmo, run home, for you will catch cold lying out here on the cement floor," Meto pleaded insistently with me.

"No, I won't either, because the cement is warm. I am afraid to stay home alone, I have told you a million times," I said, vexed. I was in truth afraid, for Teto was away in Vlora visiting her relatives.

"Do go to my room then, and sleep in my bed. I will

take you there, and you can have the windows open so that you hear the songs just as well as here," Fato suggested earnestly, standing up as if I would be sure to accept her offer.

"No, no," I thought secretly, "something is to happen here, no doubt." Their insistence on my going roused a suspicion in my head. "They must have something good to eat and do not want me to share a portion." My stomach cried "kerr-kerr" inside. "Indeed they have some sweetmeat in their pockets," I said to myself, and rested my head in a comfortable position on Fato's lap.

Minutes went by in silence, and no motion passed between the two, but I still managed to keep awake.

"Is she asleep?" whispered Meto to my dear friend, whose lap seemed so soft, so warm and soothing to my sleepy head.

"Nexh, oi Nexh, are you awake?" Fato whispered near my right ear, which faced the sky. No answer came; I made no move.

"She is sleeping," said the director's daughter in a soft tone.

"Ah, wait until something comes out," I said mutely; "wait until candy or dates come out," for my stomach still went "kerr-kerr."

Oh, but what a queer conversation took place between the two! Only words, strange words were said—only

strange sentences came out, instead of candy and dates. What was it that my own brother was saying? He described his love for Fato, assured her that he would bring her happiness and joy and brighter days. Could it be that my brother was in love with a female who had been vowed to someone else—half sold to the son of another man?

My head was flooded with words new to me and a puzzlement which I could not understand. I heard Meto say that he and Fato would run away to Corfu. "Then in time we can go to America and live there happily," said my brother in a penetrating whisper which pricked the silence of the night and the cool air of the late midnight. But in my heart, those words cut stabs.

Could it be that my only brother would run away secretly with Fato and leave behind shame, lonely fathers—and me, too, with no one to run to between heaven and earth?

What could I do? Should I rise and scream, ought I to run down the balcony stairs and expose the plot to my father and the director?

"Oh, Mana, what shall I do?"—"Sleep my child, close tight your eyelids!"—That had always been her advice to me. I fell asleep and heard no more. I had a dream with Mana and Hiqmet—I always met Hiqmet and my mother in dreams.

I was climbing a pair of winding stairs; round and

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round, higher they rose, like the steps inside a mosque minaret.

"Hold on, hold on tight, Nexhmo! Take care," cried my brother and Mana from far below. But I came to the very top of the stairs and, "Oh!" the lamp which I carried with my both hands slid from my fingers and crashed into a thousand pieces. . . .

When I woke on the following morning, I had slept in my own bed and mattress. Meto must have carried me home in his arms, and—"Where is Meto, O Lord?"

I ran to the next room, opened the door hastily, but Meto was there. He was sleeping soundly in his bed, undisturbed by my hasty entrance. Meto always slept heavily, so heavily that sometimes we threw a glass of water on his face and still could not disturb his slumbers. Now his black curls fell loosely on the pillow, one arm relaxed gracefully sideways. What, what was that red object beside his hand? I walked forward, picked up the strange thing, and observed it, gasping bitterly. Two curls, one black and the other golden, were sewn on the bow of red ribbon. My brother's curl and one from Fato's wavy hair lay side by side. Fato, the fiancée of another since childhood!

Krip had witnessed sorrow and death, tragic and bitter days, but never before had it witnessed a deed of scandal. How could the only son of my father commit such shame and destroy the praise and good reputation

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of Krip which our fathers had built up through virtue and good will, like ants building their sand hill?

I ran out, leaving the door open behind me. In the kitchen, my stepmother was stuffing green peppers for dinner. I showed her the ribbon, told her what I had heard on the previous night. "Meto is going to run away with Fato—soon—tonight, perhaps."

The news reached my father, but it did not stop there. It reached the ear of Fato's stepmother, for my Teto did not hesitate to spread such tidings outside the family. Mürat Efendi heard of it, all Krip learned the news in the course of the morning hours. It traveled to Vlora where it reached the ear of the wealthy farmer who was Fato's prospective father-in-law; a man of honor, known to all his neighbors near and far as a man of strict conduct.

Our little community was in a whirl of scoldings, threats, gossip, and the shedding of tears.

Mürat Efendi went out of his wits, for the shame was too great; he had said "besa." With his hunting gun he searched the house to find his daughter and end her life before his home was molested with yet greater scandal. Fato hid on the salt depot roof, behind the shutter of a window.

Meto was in his room, pulling his hair, for chivalry had seized his heart. It was his sweetheart for whom he worried, not for himself, he said.

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“It is you, you who deserve to be shot! You never leave two stones together; I have told you not to explore my pockets,” he shouted at me.

My father said little, but in the afternoon the horse and wagon drove him to Valona and back.

“Here is a trip ticket for you; the boat leaves tomorrow noon for Durazzo,” he said, handing the traveling stub to my brother.

“What about me, Baba?” I ran forward, my chin trembling.

“You ought to be locked in chains,” intervened my stepmother.

“I will not remain here alone if the earth turns upside down,” I cried. “I shall drown in the deep waters if you leave me behind, Meto!”

“*Lipsu!* leave the room—you know I don’t like hysterics,” ordered my father with knitted eyebrows.

In my room, I wept and sobbed until no more tears remained to shed. Then I stood up, pondered by the window, and a new decision formed in my mind. I packed my things during the silent night.

On the following day, before early dawn, a brown and a black suitcase were hidden in the courtyard, shielded by the chicken shed.

At midday, the boat *Puglia* raised its anchor and the keel began to split the waters toward Durazzo. Out on its deck, Meto stood by the railings, watching the white

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houses and tall trees dwindle in size and shape, as the boat drew farther and farther away from Krip and Valona.

My brother wept, sobs choked his throat. His blue eyes wore black rings underneath. They searched for his lover, who remained alone to face the shame and penalty.

Such is the luck of a female, for she alone receives the blame. To a man, a bit of sweetheating, a particle of flirting, and the privilege to love are like specks of dust on a mirror; so many touch the face of it, so simple it is to wipe them off—and the mirror is unharmed and clear again.

But the honor of a female is like a fragile looking glass hung by a single thread. . . .

More tears streamed on the cheeks of my brother, but the sea breezes dried them and carried his sighs away.

And on Meto's left side, as you must know, someone stood watching him with sympathy but greatly happy at heart, for the boat was bound toward Tirana.

Much had occurred in Krip within twenty-four hours, but I still could not believe that my simple mind had been its sole cause. Neither could I imagine that my mischief had worked out a scheme to take me back to Tirana. For indeed the person by Meto's left side was I, clutching my pink hat with both hands.

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I had succeeded in escaping from Krip at the very last moment. I had had no more tears to shed, but my suitcases were ready; I had words prepared to say and a voice strong enough to dramatize successfully the last moments before Mehmet's departure.

“Take her with you, for I am tired of her shouts and temper,” my father had said, just before my brother prepared to bid farewell.

“But she is not ready,” Meto had said excitedly. I was ready, though, as ready as could be, all prepared to go to high school.

“Why must females be born unhappy?” exclaimed my brother. He must have spoken to the sea, for I was feeling happy.

Chapter X

NEW LAMPS FOR OLD

THE opening day of school came. It was late October, and the cold had begun with sudden rage and falling rains.

Margarita (she was soon to be my best friend) and I arrived in one Ford car, accompanied by my brother and her father. Likewise, came our schoolmates-to-be, accompanied by their best guardians, for only thus could we grown-up girls travel on long trips of two hours, such as this one.

Chevrolets, other Fords besides ours, Fiats, and a large bus filled the path which led to the entrance. Windows of houses on both sides were overfilled with the heads of townspeople who had gathered to watch the spectacle. The big gate framed among high stone walls received us with open arms—and so, too, did the principal who stood waiting inside the entrance. Miss Irwin kissed us two on the forehead and shook hands with Meto and Margarita's parent.

After an hour, our guardians were gone, most of the girls had arrived, the large leaves of the gate closed

into their frame, and a lock hooked the padlock safely on the door.

All the hubbub and excitement which we found at our arrival now turned into a timid hush and dullness. None of us had ever been to a high school before, so that jail would have been no worse than were our first days and weeks. Some cried, others hid in corners timidly, and no one seemed to be content at finding herself in the institute. All seemed friendless.

We were given lunch at midday, shown our beds in the dormitory, and a Miss Qeraxhia announced that we were all to take baths in the big laundry room, since the bathrooms had not been built as yet.

"In one room?" we all exclaimed, turning pale in the face; "all in one room?"

"Hurry, girls, for you have only two hours' time," the Albanian teacher called.

Sixty-four grown-up girls to get washed in one single room within two hours; head, feet, and everything? All of us were puzzled at such orders, for girls of our age were always dignified about their modesty. Never before had we heard of such unspoken shame. Many wept and persisted in their stubbornness for some minutes, until Mrs. Bogdo came along.

"Quick, undress quickly, for in school one doesn't waste time," she scolded.

"But Mrs. Bogdo . . ."

"No buts, I said," demanded the teacher severely.

We cried, sighed, played, and at times were happy over our own luck to be in high school after all. We were some five dozen girls closed inside high walls, there to learn and experience a different way of life.

I recall the first meal, when we were taught to enter the room in line and then to stand before the table until the principal had said: "We thank thee, our Father in Heaven, and so forth; and Jesus Christ protect us—" We Mohammedans listened with shocked ears to Miss Irwin, for Moslems, like Christians, are not supposed to bow to the prayers of other religions. At first we feared our presence in such an atmosphere, wondering whether Allah was writing one sin each meal on his big ledger about each of us Moslems.

We sank on the bench with feeble appetites, only to notice that the food had been brought in large enamel basins. This broke our appetite the more. One held a large pile of cheese; there were apples in another, and quarter-loaves of bread in a third. We all looked with astonished eyes, for fruit in our country is never served unpeeled to anybody. And what was that? Slices of cheese, shoved inside the bread? Never before had we seen such serving of food. The sight of the basins left us open-mouthed, for basins are only used to wash the hands and clothing.

"What do they think we are, cows of the field to

swallow such food?" I remember whispering to Margarita, who sat beside me.

"Hush!" she replied, "for this is an American lunch."

I prepared to question her again, "How can wash basins be used to serve food on?" But I reserved my second complaint, for I knew that she would answer: "Hush, it is the style of the Americans."

The best ornaments in our dining room were the white-clothed tables and the thick pillars which held the ceiling from falling over us. But the pillars were a nuisance to Miss Bennett, the tall Canadian teacher, who smashed her head against them a few times while she walked across the room absent-mindedly.

I, with my two new friends, were appointed to the principal's table—or rather, we appointed ourselves, for on the first day we posted ourselves there, wishing to be near the principal.

"Sit up straight, girls, backs straight," came the order from the head of the table. Yes, yes, said our hungry expressions, but what have we tonight for Sunday supper?

What, macaroni cooked in milk and sugar? And in the other wash basin, what was that? Oof, cabbage salad with apples, and seasoned with sugar, plus salt, plus milk, plus—only God above could guess what more there was in it.

"How these Americans can eat sugar in food where they use oil and vinegar, I wish Allah could tell me," Bedrie said from across the table. She was our new mate, added to our sudden close intimacy. Bedrie had black eyes, which shone and rolled in humor even at sad moments.

"Sugar is for cake and coffee, not to put in macaroni and cabbage," she added, wrinkling her nose with disgust.

Yes, yes, right she was, but look what came now!

"What is that?" I inquired a little impolitely, as I noticed a third wash basin arrive, with something yellow and floating in white sauce. All necks stretched upwards to look.

"Squash, yellow squash, by Allah," said one, loudly enough for all the big dining room to hear.

"Oh, no, moy budallage, that looks more like yellow candle-sticks cut in pieces than squash or cucumber," Shpresa corrected wisely.

The gestures of the face gave enough evidence to make Miss Irwin understand our questioning. We all laughed amusedly, while our eyes still turned toward the head of the table with curiosity.

"Carrots—carrots—good." Miss Irwin pointed her finger at the dish.

"Carr-ots? We never heard of them," said our blank expressions. All ears opened with anxiety.

"Carrots from America," she said, looking at the dish with unusual admiration, and passing the basin to us.

"Oh, ho," we sighed with relief and pleasure. They came from America, so they must be all right; and we filled our plates generously with "carrots—good."

All faces puckered and lips twitched as we took the first taste. All the white napkins rushed to mouths, and Shpresa ran outside suddenly, coughing. The head teacher stood up to translate the order which Miss Irwin spoke in English.

"All carrots must be eaten before you leave the table," Mrs. Bogdo said with much dignity. She was a compatriot of my town, Libohova, and compatriots of the same town always help each other when they are in need. Besides, Zonya Bogdo was my cousin; but neither of these facts brought aid. Her discipline had but one way; nothing could divert it. She saw my plate of carrots empty into my beret, which stood on my lap. Her small blue eyes were the keenest that I have ever met.

Did you ever have to eat food out of a dirty beret that has been worn for half a year? I did. I ate my "carrots—good," for my cousin spied on me, and Miss Irwin commanded me to do so. This was my memory of my first taste of the first carrots that were ever grown in Albania.

"You are dishonest and need to be punished severely," the directress scolded.

“Yes, Miss Irwin,” I replied, for that was all that I could say or understand in the English language.

The teacher in charge gave me castor oil as part of the penalty, and put me to bed in the vast dormitory with doors and shutters close shut.

It was pitch dark, and, from the floor, fairies dressed in white popped out like mushrooms on a field before my terrified eyes. I shivered and trembled on the upper berth of my double wooden bed.

“Allah, why am I so unlucky as to receive the first punishment in school?” I wondered, as tears dripped on the cambric pillow case. “And the fairies are coming—”

“Nexh, are you afraid?” a voice whispered from the dark, interrupting my sorrowful thoughts. Could fairies be spirits, souls of angel-hearted people like Hiqmet and Mana, who came to earth in disguise? Did not Xha Xhemo once tell us a story of a soul visiting in the shape of a lamb?

Oh, but Mana never called me Nexh; she always said *Nexhmo!*

“Nexhmei moy, are you afraid?” Two figures advanced to my bed.

“Oh, you frightened me.” I spoke with relief, seeing that these were only two of my new friends.

“Did they give you too much castor oil, oi Nexhmei?”

“Two big tablespoons, the biggest she could find in the kitchen.” I blew angrily at the thought of the thick

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oil which still remained between my gums. "Better go away, for Miss Bennett will catch you here."

"Gra-la-la, we have permission." Shpresa wriggled her head amusedly.

"Miss Irwin sent us herself, for she knew you would be afraid, but she asked us not to tell anybody," Margarita added joyfully as they both hopped over my bed. "Tomorrow she wants us in her room—"

"But—"

"She will give us cookies," she said.

"Oh," I replied, breathing out loud.

"Obbo-boo, moy Nexho," Shpresa said. "Miss Irwin made us tremble and imagine horror this evening."

"Why?"

"She thinks the building is too old and very likely to catch fire one night when we are asleep. She taught us tonight that if we hear the big bell ring in double timing like the church bell when someone dies, that will mean fire."

"How much excitement there will be," I sighed, turning the thought over inside my head.

II

The school rose in the center of Kavaja, a city of the North, whose people were very old-fashioned Ghegs who scorned and sneered as they passed by the high

walls and heard girls' voices shouting and giggling from inside.

"They sound like monkeys in a forest," once said a man who must have had an unfavorable idea of monkeys. Old women predicted to one another that our school was a step toward demoralization.

Our parents at home wondered and pondered whether we were safe, since false gossip traveled and doubled from town to town.

When pork was served to the Christians, the rest of us ate lamb, since no true Mohammedan is supposed to eat the flesh of pigs. Shpresa, who was courageous in all things, ventured one time to steal a small bit from a Christian's plate to discover what taste it had. I tried it next, and we both decided that the meat was genuine.

"I think I will eat pork instead of lamb the next time they serve it," Shpresa decided seriously. But I protested to my friend:

"The Koran forbids it, moy Shpresa; it is sinful."

"Oh, moy budallage, Mohammed did not give any such order. It was an important hodja in Arabia who forbade it. Why should it be a sin when Mohammed gave no such order?"

"Who told you?" I asked.

"My father. He told me that in Arabia the climate is very hot, and one very hot day the important hodja ate pork for dinner, and he ate so fast and so much that

for nine days afterwards he had hot pains in the stomach."

"And then?"

"And then, the meat disgusted him so greatly that he gave orders to add in the Koran that Moslems were to eat pork no more."

I took Shpresa's words seriously, and the next time roast pork was served we two feasted on it as if we were Christians. Many girls did the same, but when our parents heard of our committed sin, most were furious and threatened to withdraw us from school.

"Oh, I wish it were as hot here as it was in Arabia," said Margarita seriously one day, as if she directed the wish to Aladdin.

We laughed heartily, but her comment was not laughable at all. The days had grown cold, and the school shivered under its old age. The displaced corners of the roof rattled musically on windy days, as did the teeth in our mouths during the cold days of winter.

The school itself looked more like a pumpkin, cut in two and set with the domes upward to use for an ornament. It had been a house of adventure and history once, and now survived as a relic of the past. Once, a cruel Turkish governor had lived there and practised torture on people down in its cellars. Then it became a prison for criminals; and after our freedom from Turkey the house had been abandoned, for the place

was haunted by spirits during the night. The neighbors related stories of how the invisible beings feasted and played the drum whenever the moon was not out.

“There are no spirits outside of folk tales and books,” we contradicted proudly; for cultured people, we had learned, believed no more in supernatural beings in the world. But at the same time a fear crept in our hearts, for which of us had not been born and raised under superstitious beliefs? The Albanian mother uses fear on a child as her principal tool, since that proves most effective. For instance, whenever my sister’s children did not want to sleep, Teto-Ado approached their bed with a white sheet thrown over her, pretending to be a ghost or goblin who would carry them off if they continued their crying. All the children’s stories are about spirits, fairies, and ghosts.

In school, the teachers tried to remove mythical beliefs from our heads. Their methods were many and constant; some of them not altogether wise, perhaps. “Instead of smoothing the eyebrows, you put the eyes out,” an Albanian would say on such an occasion, quoting the proverb.

When Miss Irwin’s birthday came, teachers, students and servants all took part in the celebration. We sang songs, chanted “Nearer, My God, to Thee,” and prayed, saying the “Our Father,” for of songs and prayers we

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had heard many. We also ate luscious cookies and drank tea which came from America.

Near the end, I stood on my two trembling feet to recite "Rosa Bonheur," which I had memorized and re-memorized for eight days before the event. Its words meant nothing to me nor to the audience, for we could speak but little English as yet. The teachers were amused at my English and laughed behind their cups, pretending that they drank tea. I stuttered and stammered through the lines of Rosa Bonheur's life, and at the end of a few endless minutes I sank down on my chair, shaking as in fever. My face must have been bloodless, for I felt cold chills creeping over my cheeks and forehead.

But I liked the party. We all did. To us Moslems, such a celebration was new; very puzzling to our minds. For Moslems never give fêtes to mark the day that they were born. They never think of that day as different from the other three hundred and sixty-four days of the year. The typical villager does not even know on what day of the year he came into this world. He does not know his age, but neither does this absence of information bother his mind. If one questions a farmer as to how old he is, the reply will be somewhat like this:

"Oh, I don't know. I think I am fifty or forty-four, but I feel as if I ought to be between fifty and sixty."

Another: "My strength says, I am forty or some five or ten years older than forty, but I don't know. My neighbors say I was born in the year of the big earthquake."

But the principal's birthday festivity seemed to be as breathtaking as a wedding celebration or an Easter day.

"I like it so much that I wish I were a Christian, too," Bedrie whispered cautiously in my ear.

"Don't speak such words from your mouth, for Allah will add a sin to your soul," I answered back softly.

"Do they celebrate like this every year?"

"Yes. Don't speak any more, for Americans think it is impolite to whisper in the presence of others." I turned and noticed Miss Irwin with her head bent, ready to call on God, the last prayer of the day. . . .

At the end of our first year, Miss Irwin left our school for ever. Margarita, Shpresa, and I hid ourselves in the laundry room and wept bitterly, shedding tears in soiled laundry piles where we buried our faces deep, for we three had been Miss Irwin's favorites. She had worked, taught with patience, led with enthusiasm, and she herself had taught us the first steps of English—the hardest. And by the end of that year we could recite poems, sing songs, and speak English whenever we found ourselves in need of communicating with our foreign teachers.

III

After that first year, teachers and principals in our school changed like coins on a market day. Some remained no longer than a few weeks; and we, the students, who had come to learn, were the constant victims of changes and replacements. Conflicting ideas, school principles, and dialects of English confused our minds like fish in a whirlpool.

Miss Russell, who came from England, predicted that “eether” was out of style, and that now people said “eyether,” with a heavy accent on the vowels.

“No, no, no, no-w girls, ‘shap,’ not ‘shop’; that is terrible!”

Miss Evans, from America, declared that Albanian girls were too fat. “You must learn to eat less bread,” she told us whenever she had nothing to scold us about at supper time.

“But, Miss Evans,” we protested politely, “all girls are supposed to be fat if you expect them to be healthy until they are grandmothers.”

She laughed at our statement and we at hers, for neither understood the other.

In my country, girls have plump shoulders and red cheeks like the skin of a ripe apple. But it is very extraordinary to find an aged woman who is stout and rounded with excessive weight of flesh. The women, and

likewise the men, are as a rule slim, which, as I can explain, comes from a general habit of thought. When a person reaches the age of thirty, she is no longer young, we believe. The time for old age has arrived for her, the time for worries too. If she has no worries, she will create them out of profitless problems.

Indeed, adults eat no breakfast. They drink thick coffee, and the men puff countless cigarettes. The husband begins to worry as to whether he will live to be too old, so that the money saved will not last until the end of his days.

The wife has greater worries. "Will my children be happy for ever? Will my daughter bring forth sons to her husband? O Allah, will my nephew's sore eye get well again so that he can see the moon and sun once more?"

Thus the old father and mother, whose youth has set behind their life because they have reached the age of thirty-five or less, must rest their thoughts no more in joy and peace. Their nights grow sleepless, their appetite is gone, and their heads ache furiously from these confounding worries.

"Ah, for the days of youth," they exclaim whenever they hear a young heart laugh out happily. . . .

Only little by little did I realize that the years were passing, and with them many old characteristics, old words, and many customs, most of which were better than the ones that were taking their place. Relics of past

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generations disappeared to nowhere and were gone with no honors or good praise. "The world is changing fast, like water in a windmill," people said. Others only held their tongues, fretting in silence, for the aged man adores the old manners that gave him life and brought him up. But so is the world, changing for ever.

Inside our school walls, however, we felt something of what went on outside. We, too, like the outsiders, said "please" in place of the old, "may you live to be a hundred," and shook hands with friends, instead of embracing one another as the old custom was for greeting.

It was the era when modernism was invading the big cities of the nation. As for the farmer, the village man, he looked aghast at these city changes when he came to town on market day to sell his goods. He could not quite trust his eyes, for out in the streets of the city he observed scenes which on the last market day he could not even have imagined.

"Have I a sunstroke, or have my eyes gone crazy?" wondered the farmer in puzzled amazement. "Can my eyes be well, and does the madness lie not within me but out there in the streets? Bah, look!"

Females, wives of husbands, occupied the streets and sidewalks in such number that one could not count them. Walking down the principal avenues at nine o'clock in the morning, like men!

"Where are they going?"

"To market, my good farmer; to market to do the shopping."

"Waa! a woman doing a man's duty? A woman shopping?"

Klick, klick, klick, said the high heels on women's feet as they paced the sidewalks and cobbled streets of the city. Yes, high heels they wore. Nowadays all wore high heels on their scrapina, as these modern shoes were called.

"It is the ugliest name given to a human garment," once said a farmer of the Tirana regions. "Isu Krisht, protect my family from such scandal, such shame," and the ignorant farmer made the sign of the Cross on his chest. He had observed short sleeves on women, large-brimmed hats on their shingled hair. They no longer wore headkerchiefs nor tcharchaffs. Instead, they wore pins with rhinestones on the chopped threads of hair that remained on their scalps, and they used brilliantine, not chicken grease, to keep the hair shiny and in crusts against the head.

Ah, these city people could afford it; they had money. But the poor villagers born and raised mountaineers among trees, hills, plains, flowers, cattle, and snow in winter—they possessed no such privileges, no such joys. They owned no luxuries except good health and love in the family and friendship among their fellow villagers.

"Ah, the world is made for some only to enjoy—for others, only to strive and suffer till they die," Sadik had said once to my father, many years back.

"Ah, Sadik, I wonder where he is now," I pondered one day, longing in my memory for the old shepherd. "Sadik has gone away," Father had written in his letter, which I held in my hand.

"Our dear old Sadik, does he play his flute now, wherever he is, as in the days past, or is he still in mourning for his only son that died?"

"Nexhme, hurry, for we are going out for a walk," Margarita summoned from the window above. I went up. "Have you heard?"

"What?"

"The mayor has sent a letter to Miss Foster, demanding that we girls are not to pass through the main streets of the city any more when we go out for walks."

"Why, who gave you such news!"

"Wait, I will tell you; Miss Foster did. And we are not to wear short-sleeved dresses, nor socks, and we are not to talk in the streets. The people of Kavaja are gossiping and criticizing both the girls and teachers," my friend narrated, in her accustomed manner. Margarita was always calm.

"But who told you?" I insisted.

"She did, Miss Foster—she read the letter to all the girls. Where were you?"

“By the well.”

“I called and called you; why didn’t you answer?
What were you doing alone?”

“Thinking about you,” I replied frankly.

“What did you find to think about me? That I am a little shorter, that you have blue-green-brown and I don’t know what colored eyes, and that mine are black? That you love me and you show it, and that I love you much more but don’t show it? Or were you planning some new mischief?”

“No, I was thinking how lucky you are to have three grown brothers who all want you to go to Europe and study and become modern and be able to dance. My brother plans the contrary for me.”

“Ah, moy Nexhmie, stop that nonsense, for we have three more years here.” She embraced and hugged me tight, and kissed me on the cheek. It was the first time that my school-mate had shown me her affection. She reserved her feelings, love, friendship, and all else down in that deep abyss of her heart where they remain pure but invisible. So was and is my friend Margarita.

IV

When we had first come to school, our eyes had rested on a large tablet which hung like a picture on the front wall of the school building. The words “Hedstrom

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Hall" stood on it, painted in black on canvas. But no one of us knew why two such meaningless words were hung up before our eyes mysteriously. Bedrie came to a conclusion one day.

"It must be the name of the man who opened our school," she said.

"No, moy budallage, it cannot be," I corrected; "did you forget that the word 'hall' means corridor?"

"Why not? these Americans bear queer names anyhow. There is Mr. Button in the boys' school, and Mr. Fox, and Mr. Feather, the new visitor," reasoned my friend wisely.

One day three years later, we noticed "Hedstrom Hall" being ripped from its place. The cook carried it into the kitchen, there to burn it in the iron stove.

"Girls, we are going to a new building very soon. A new school is being built for you out in the country," announced the head teacher at supper that evening. "The Near East Foundation has taken our school in charge now; Hedstrom Hall is gone."

"Mr. Hedstrom Hall gone?" we all questioned a little sadly. The teachers laughed at our ignorance, for these foreign teachers could not believe that Albanian girls little knew what the word "foundation" or "society" or "company" meant to them. There existed no incorporated societies in Albania, and therefore we knew not how to picture the meaning of such a word.

"Heavens, there is much that you girls need to learn," sighed the foreign teachers discouragingly. "Girls in America . . ."

Soon, however, no more high walls caged our souls and eyes, no roofs of other houses shut off the face of the moon and sun. We had come to the new school, where our neighbors were the fields, the sea, and the vast sky above.

Our ears did not itch any more from the noise of oxcarts, rattling their ungreased wheels through the streets of Kavaja, and the loud cries of people on market days. Here fields planted with corn and maize spread like wings on both sides of the hill over which our school was erected. Before, the blue Adriatic stretched calm and sparkling, with its big port of Durazzo rising in the distance. Ships, sailboats like butterflies with white wings, glided along the surface. I watched them come and go with love and admiration, as I had done in Krip.

The olive groves which rose up tall behind our crowned hill were the homes of birds and flowers and of little animals too; bees, butterflies, and harmless serpents which we often saw, wandering patiently along the face of the warm earth. The silvery olive branches hummed and whispered at night to keep company to our dreams. During the day, they fanned cool air as we lay under their shade to study or for a short repose.

Krip seemed to have come to me, now that I and all

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my dear ones were gone from there. (My father, too, had left Krip for ever, I discovered, to live in Libohova. He had packed the household things and resigned from his office, since all his friends were gone.)

“It is the same sea that stretched near my home; the splashing foam before me must be waves traveling from the shores of Valona,” I once wrote truthfully in a classroom composition.

“We don’t like sentimental people—they don’t make good teachers,” my instructor told me on the next day, before all the class.

Teachers! Ah, that was an important word, now that the Near East Foundation had bought our institute from its former owners. Every student had had to sign a pledge to teach for at least three years after graduation. It was the government’s demand, the Near East Foundation’s idea, and our duty to keep the promise. Would we?

“Girls, you are the future of your country,” Miss Evans lectured to us repeatedly in the parlor, dormitory, and dining room.

“Yes, Miss Evans,” we said, for the teacher was new. Now Miss Camp and Miss Smith, Mrs. Taylor and other teachers had come. Meanwhile, Miss Foster, Miss Petrovich from Czechoslovakia, Miss Lawrence from Jugoslavia, and many more misses had gone, their bags

bulging with new contents, for the dear girls had showered them all with presents. Here is how it was done:

“Very dear Papa, I hope you are all well, I am very well, except for what I have to tell you below: Listen carefully dear Papa: Send me immediately, by the fastest mail, one napoleon and two dollars because the school demands it before the end of this week. If you delay the money, I shall be excluded from classes—perhaps from school! My eyes are swollen from worry because I have cried. I kiss your hand with respect and please don’t forget. Your dear and obedient daughter,

—Evgjenia Gjogu.”

What could the papa do upon receiving such a letter from his “being-educated daughter” in school? You see, he never went to school himself, and therefore was ignorant of these sudden school demands. The papa, of course, was poor, for only a few girls had fathers with wealth and gold napoleons. A fivepence weighed the sweat of half a day’s work—but what could he do? The parent was ignorant and simple; what did he know except pride and honor?

“Bah, I told you not to send our girl to school,” said the wife revengefully to the husband. “I wish you would take a woman’s idea for once in your life.”

“Eh, Wife, what do you know of ideas? It is right,

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whoever said that females have lumps of hair instead of brains inside their heads. Why do you speak at all? You don't know what is happening to the world these days. By Allah, today no man will marry a girl unless she takes him a fat sum of gold napoleons, or otherwise a school education . . . not by that mosque and by that heaven, he won't marry her otherwise. Don't you see how the country is full of girls of twenty and twenty-five whose fathers can't find husbands for them? And why?—Oh, why waste breath explaining things to a female."

"Right you may be, Husband, but don't forget that our daughter shall be stale—aged, too, by the time she spends five years in that school. She will be twenty by then, don't forget, oy master of the house."

"Po, po, you spoke enough. Better attend to your housework," said the man of the house angrily, and went out in search of a friend—to borrow one napoleon and two dollars!

And so the money came, the presents were bought, and the teachers departed with expensive souvenirs given by girls whose names they never learned to pronounce.

v

Above the olive groves and the twisting path which led to its top, lay the neighborhood of our school. On

the summit, a dozen cypresses provided shade for the bodies of the dead. Stones of all shapes marked the heads of graves, mounds of soil covered the bodies, and crooked sticks marked the feet. Such are the ordinary cemeteries of farmers.

As we walked beside it, girls shrank and Mrs. Taylor's dog Lea sniffed her nose displeasedly, but went on her way again.

On the other side lay green slopes, fields of grain, woods of tall birches and fragrant pines, and flocks of sheep grazing on luscious clover, with their shepherds near by. Farmers plowing their land, streams, a pretty brook, another running water, and then came seven tiny villages lying far apart from each other. There rose the primitive homes of farmers, built of field stone and sticky clay.

In a tiny village some four miles off, a little mosque stood on the foot of a slope. It was old and shabby from age and poverty, the house of prayer where the hodja of the mosque and the men of near-by villages came to kneel and pray before Allah on Holy Days.

But on weekdays the mosque was a schoolhouse. Sons of farmers, six or ten years of age, came there every day to learn how to read and write.

We, the senior students, were their instructors; on them we practised how to teach.

We wore hats and furred coats and boots on our feet

during the cold days of winter. A seven-foot tall guard escorted us on the way in order to keep off any danger. But our pupils each wore a tiny fez, each an old kerchief tied over the ears to keep away the crisp wind and cold. Their coats and jackets were of goat's wool which their mothers had woven and spun. Their ankles and feet were bare, summer and winter. The mud had chapped their soles; the cold cracked their toes and numbed the flesh and nerves.

"Why don't you wear openga," we girls of the city asked the shivering youngsters.

"Sheepskin is scarce. My father has to sell it all in town," was the reply. My heart pained to hear such answers. I could read the second answer in their beautiful faces: "Poverty has snatched away our liberty to wear shoes on our feet." Was it the misery of their living days, their poverty, which made them all so wise, so clever?

Then came little girls to the mosque school, to learn how to read and write also. They wore a cotton piece of cloth to cover their black or blonde tresses, for even a girl of six must wear something to hide her hair. They looked like dolls as they sat on the benches, flipping their long eyelashes timidly and giggling under the desk. They, too, walked on bare feet.

"Aren't you afraid to come all alone from so far off?"

Margarita and I were questioning a girl of nine, who traveled three miles each way.

“No, because I come to school,” she said with a proud face.

As we returned to our own school that noon, Margarita spoke, looking pensively at the ground:

“I wonder what school means to these little farmers? They must like it, to walk through mud and storm. What could that little girl be thinking when she said that she was not afraid to walk alone from so far because she came to school?”

“I don’t know,” I answered. Was school something divine to that little farm girl and her mates? Did they believe school was great like Allah, and could protect them from fear and danger?

Chapter XI

THE FINGER OF SIN

“I AM sorry, the Minister of Education will see no woman.”

“But I wish to have an interview with him,” I cut in with abruptness.

“Long life to you, mademoiselle, but the minister will see no female; it is his law.”

“Yes, that I have been told, but could he not make an exception?”

“I regret to say that he never has. Who are you, mademoiselle, anyhow?” he inquired, gazing at me idly through his horn-rimmed glasses, which for some reason did not seem to sit straight over his Cæsar-like nose.

“Nexhme Zaimi of Libohova,” I replied with concealed fright, as I stood before the desk of the severe-looking official. “I have come here thirteen times before, and for the same purpose, but the whole ministry happened to be in conference each time.”

“Oh, yes, indeed, it is our busy month—mademoiselle, won’t you take a seat in one of my chairs for a

while and rest your feet? Ho, ho, aren't you the daughter of Mustafa Zaimi of Libohova, the sister-in-law of Gani Chano, the niece of the Prokuror, the cousin of Judge Sulo? And isn't Mr. Libohova of the King's Court your relative or cousin? Eh, by Allah, I sometimes forget the names of my friends; that is too bad," he ended at last, revealing a dull smile and two rows of broad white teeth under a black moustache whose ends perched in curls on either cheek. "Won't you have a cigarette, or are you not quite that modern yet?"

"No, thank you, but could I find a way to see the Minister of Education? It is very important."

"I must say, you are wasting the breath of your lungs in vain, mademoiselle, for he does not approve of females ever coming here. You know, our minister is conservative and believes that women teachers should find jobs through their fathers or brothers. And besides, interviews are appropriate only for men."

He sat behind an expensive desk, leaning comfortably on the hind legs of his chair, as all officials enjoy the pleasure of posing when inferior visitors or friends are present. Two rings on either hand proved him a high-salaried official, and so did the suit which he wore, and the brown shoes with pointed toes, Parisian style. Indeed, he must have been to Paris; for how could he otherwise use the word "mademoiselle" so elegantly after everything he said?

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Opposite him, I sat on a cushioned chair, moving nervously from side to side as if I were sitting on a bed of thorns. With effort I tried to reply, "yes, yes," to the official's conversation, which by this time had become as interesting as a toothache.

In the meantime, my brain was being raided by the usual worries that attack a female's mind: "Goodness, am I dressed right for the occasion? Would he think that I am wearing my fur just to show that I have one? Oh, why did I wear it!" My hands played nervously with what once had been a fox's tail; my knees inside my blue satin dress squeezed together tightly, as if wanting to hide deeper from the sight of this man to whom I had come begging for a chance to ask for a position.

"Oh, world, world, does everyone suffer this same way to find a job?" an intolerable feeling cried within my chest.

But at once a wind of courage crept into my heart, holding its pounding blood in control: "Why should I be frightened; am I not a high school graduate? Haven't I a diploma which entitles me to teach?"

I turned my head, and saw that outside dusk had fallen and the street-lamps were being lit. I straightened my back, loosened my knees, and, with a resolute expression like that of which I had read in books, I opened my mouth to speak:

"Could you, sir, change his mind? Tell the minister

that I am here in search of work without my father's knowledge!"

"Ah, mademoiselle, you know that the Albanian never changes his mind; his decisions are written laws."

But for once my stubbornness proved to be of service. When I left the ministry, I was gliding on the tips of my toes; the Minister of Education, Albanian or not, had changed his mind. Without the knowledge of my parents, I had been given a job as teacher—I had signed my name to a public paper with ink that could not be rubbed off from the severe-looking register.

When I came home and told all this to Father, shock paralyzed his tongue. And then all night he wailed melodiously about his younger daughter who was to become a public servant on the following daybreak.

"Lock her up, oy Husband," assisted my stepmother, who sat beside him through his worries, her eyelids drooping with the weight of sleepiness. "For what will people say but that you can't even control your own child?"

But the next day came at last, and the world seemed to glow with triumph.

"Nexhmo, sister, remember to be serious and dignified with the girls, now you are a teacher," were the last words of Hano as I stepped into the carriage among my three suitcases, my fox fur hanging on my left arm.

"Gjok-gjok!" said the coachman, and away I went,

driving up in style to the gates of the "Institute Mëma Mbretneshe."

II

Within a vast stone wall, rising on the outskirts of Tirana, stood seven buildings, and two sheds for wood and charcoal. Three hundred girls, a dozen women teachers, cooks, and servants filled the Institute to overflowing. There teachers taught, and learned more lessons themselves; there men professors came to teach during the day, and then left at once through the single guarded gate which had admitted them.

The big iron entrance stood always latched and locked for the purpose of double protection. The porter who kept watch from dawn to midnight was a woman four and a half feet tall. She wore cobbled shoes like a man's, which clicked under her weight when she took steps to and fro. Her voice and physical strength were like a man's, too, but otherwise she was an absolute female. For only females could live inside the walls. All were females: the water carrier who drew water out of the well for the school use, the woodchopper, the janitor, and even the night guard who carried, instead of a revolver, two butcher knives sticking from under her leather belt.

Outside the walls, armed gendarmes protected the safety and honor of the girls with special precautions. At

night, and fewer in number by daylight, too, these armed men toured around and around with their rifles bayoneted, ready to use on anyone who dared to approach the walls inside which three hundred grown-up girls lived.

This was the first and only girls' high school established by the government—a kind of show-piece. There they were taught languages, science, songs, and history; and three times a week they went through dignified gymnastics out in the back courts.

The girls could talk and giggle, of course; but they were forbidden to laugh aloud as their lungs desired, for the city was close and someone there might hear their voices—Allah forbid!

Students could see their parents, but not their young brothers—for who knew what tricks these modern youths might play? No girl could go to the theatre, since moving pictures were only appropriate for boys and married men. Teachers, like the girls, were guarded by similar precautions. For, like the students, we could wear no dresses with collars that exposed flesh below the larynx boundary, nor with sleeves above the limit of the wrist watch.

My first misstep (for of course I would not remember Hano's parting words) was to let myself be caught one morning before sunrise, playing tennis with one of my colleagues. My second came when I was found

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climbing a tree to feast on mulberries. But worse than these was the time I was seen drinking lemonade in a public café with a young man. Naturally, he turned out to be my brother.

Teachers were to be teachers: nothing less, nothing more.

Many times, in days gone by, my mother had tried to describe to me how I had had to sleep in my cradle, bound hand and foot, during the first two years of my childhood, able then to move only my eyeballs from side to side, free only to wail whenever I pleased. Never had I been able to imagine any of the discomforts of those two years until now, at the age of nineteen, when I found myself bound fast to three hundred cradles.

Yet had ever that wooden cradle of my babyhood, and the straps that bound me into it, harmed even a toe of mine, or the tip of my little finger? I could see no sign that they had. Old women said that the cradle was what made a man strong, a mind firm, a body patient to endure the endless strife of living. So now, I wondered, could it be that this cradle of an institute was equipping me with the arms of strength and patience, female though I was?

For by now new schemes were knitting in my head. I was teaching English outside of school hours, saving money, squeezing every penny that I earned. I had written to my two friends in America, with whom I had

become acquainted through a letter-writing contest in my high-school days. I told them how much I wished to go to their land. "I like American teachers and I want to become like one of them. Could I not go there to study for a year or two?"

Each day I waited for news to come, while a fear re-echoed within my heart: Would my whole scheme crumble to nothing? Would I have to spend my days doing what some husband told me—some profiteer, no doubt?

"Ah, but, Mustafa's daughter, the finger of sin rests upon your soul. You have exposed yourself to the world and lowered the name of your family. Every female in your ancestry lived and died as a decent wife and a blessed mother who brought forth fat and rosy-cheeked sons to her husband. You, a public servant; it is a disgrace. No sponge can wash it off!" Thus the scoldings of my family re-echoed in my ears, and haunted my soul in dreams at night. . . .

The clock said nearly noon; the calendar showed that June was drawing in its days and school would soon close, but no news had come from my American friends. I perched on the little platform at the head of the classroom, watching over the girls who were performing their geography examination.

I could hear whispers from all directions, but my attention was drowned in more important thoughts. The

girls were giggling, some of them laughing, but why shouldn't I let them do as they pleased? Let their young hearts laugh, if it pleased their souls to do so. Had I not allowed my own thoughts to go astray?

The classroom door opened. A professor entered, his face beaming more broadly than was his usual manner. His right hand passed two blue-stamped letters to mine. "From Mrs. Florence S. Duryea," one envelope said on the upper corner. "From Mrs. Florence MacMahon," said the other. "We shall be very happy to have you come to America and live with us, Nexhmie dear," said each letter inside; "and we will help you to get your education."

I did not know that my feet were bouncing on the platform, my hands pressing the letters against my heart, tears streaming down my face. No one knew what had happened, or why this sudden explosion of my dignity and self-control. But that day the girls had a chance to copy the geography examination, though through my tears I could see books resting open on all their laps. What of it? *I could go to America!*

III

The last days of school were drawing nearer, and the joyful preparations for departure had already begun. Trunks were packed and tied with rope, awaiting ship-

ment; closets were unloaded; suitcases were dragged out from under the beds and dumped in irregular display along the four vast dormitory hallways.

Excitement had spread like an epidemic among the girls, teachers, and servants. Now rules meant little to the happy-hearted girls, while the teachers lost their enthusiasm for imposing punishment. The girls' voices had suddenly gone up in pitch, letting out choristic laughs of "ha-ha-ha" which reached the ears of old-fashioned neighbors and caused their spines to shiver from the shock.

Even the director of the school grew generous at heart—a marked change that no one could help noticing. One day he announced that we all were to have a picnic to celebrate the joy of the closing year.

"But we must first wait for the minister to send reply if we can take the girls out into strange fields."

"Why does the minister give orders even on our minor activities?" I interrupted light-mindedly.

"But it is no minor matter to take three hundred girls out into the strange country for a whole day, Miss Libohova," he replied, opening his eyes and ruffling his forehead in astonishment.

"Oh, po, po, zoti director," I said, walking away and speaking to myself in silence: "I am going to America, am I not? Yes, I am and I am!"

Then came the picnic day: We stepped out of the gate

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one morning early, and in a line, two by two, the procession headed for some remote hills on the outskirts of Tirana.

The picnic procession looked more like a funeral escorting the body of a celebrity to the grave. The slow-footed director marched in the very front of the line, leading his three hundred girls who followed in suppressed silence and with footsteps that wiggled with their desire to skip and hop right there in the middle of the city street.

“Oh, but I am going to America,” I thought again and again, the same words ticking in my head ceaselessly like the beating of the clock.

I was called to run to the head of the line; the director had something to say. I ran and stood at his side like a bellboy waiting for orders.

“Did you tell the girls that they were not to wear transparent dresses?”

“Yes, I inspected them before we stepped out,” I replied humbly.

“When we pass through the boulevard, be sure that every girl watches her way and keeps her eyes down,” he commanded, swinging his wax-colored cane in a slow pendulum-like motion, as if he were the Pope heading the procession.

We reached the picnic field at last, an olive grove surrounded by gigantic trees and bushes that grew tall and

wild. The girls scattered to play and run inside the limits of the field, while the teachers and the director sank on the ground with exhaustion.

At sunset, we lined again by twos. The day had ended well, except for the tactless behavior of one young teacher who, instead of joining her colleagues, had run off to play and frolic with the students. The director had caught her riding a stray donkey.

“Miss Zaimi of Libohova, I am compelled to report your behavior to the Minister of Education,” the voice of the director rang out in anger. “What will I expect of the girls if I find you, a teacher, riding a . . . a disreputable animal that I do not even wish to pronounce the name of?”

“I forgot,” I replied, lowering my head in shame. I, a teacher, caught riding a donkey—how could I have done such a thing, when I knew well enough that I was no more a small child in Krip where I was free to hop on any donkey that wandered by? How?

“I regret to tell you, but this is a heavy mark of misbehavior,” he added, walking away from the scene.

Albanians never say, “I am sorry,” or “I regret,” or “I beg your forgiveness”; the director must have stolen the expression from some foreign tongue. Should I have said, “Oh, excuse me, excuse me, zoti director?” I wondered? But no, Albanians don’t scatter false apologies.

“I don’t care,” I replied softly, but with anger. “I am

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going to America. I am going to a big school—and when I graduate, I shall be back to take your place, Mr. Paphristo." Only the afternoon breeze heard me, and its soft wings dried the tears on my cheeks.

We entered the gate of the school, and the Institute filled again with the noise and presence of the three hundred, after a day's rest of emptiness and silence.

"I think the girls should go to bed immediately!" The director spoke from his office balcony, where he stood sniffing his vase of growing carnations.

"But it is only eight, and the girls can't be very tired," I answered from below, stretching my neck upwards with effort, as if I were playing the part of Romeo. "Besides, the girls are hungry and need supper."

"Bah, who can think of food. . . . I am still having indigestion from the lunch's results," retorted the director from the balcony, thrusting his chest forward and ruffling his forehead into horizontal lines.

Ho, ho, yes, it was only natural, for he had not left his sitting-place in the field except for a few inspections; but had he never heard that young people need swallow no spoonfuls of bicarbonate of soda after picnics? I walked toward the dormitory to execute the director's orders.

When the clock said nine, tranquillity ruled the house from tip to end.

Outside the walls of the Institute, night guards in uniform, arms on shoulder, made their tours round and round the school walls. Now and then their footsteps posed a moment in silence; nothing broke the monotony of the quiet summer night. Then their cobbled shoes clicked again on the pavement; the gendarmes began a new round.

In the courtyard, my friend and colleague walked slowly at my side, unconsciously keeping time with the footsteps of the guard outside the walls. All else rested in silence within; all seemed asleep, except for us two.

“This is sufficient and blessed,” the director would have remarked, had he been present. But by then he was resting in his home, which lay somewhere in the city.

Suddenly, out of the still night, screams were heard from within the big dormitory.

“Allah! what can it be, an earthquake?” I cried with fright to my friend, who remained paralyzed on the spot.

“It must be fire,” my mind decided in confusion; “and Allah! what orders am I supposed to give?”

For the first time I felt the need for power and help, but no help came. It was my duty and that of the sub-director to take charge of the girls, but Miss Hlavda was deaf in both ears.

“Quick, call the police! Quick!” I gave orders

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breathlessly to the porter, who had appeared from the gatehouse. With swiftness she reached the nearest window.

“Police, police, oy police!” her loud cries echoed near and far through the neighborhood.

A black figure appeared on the high terrace alongside the main dormitory. It was the woodchopper.

“It was me the children saw, miss,” she called to me. “One of them woke with a nightmare and thought she saw a man climbing the gutter-pipe. It was me she saw, here on the terrace.”

I reached the main hall to find the three hundred girls, their hair disheveled, a wild sight, pushing one another down the four flights of stairs. They wore nothing but their white cambric gowns. Their feet were bare and their speed was magnificent.

Already the hall was filling with police, gendarmes, soldiers, and men neighbors who had come to our rescue with the utmost speed before realizing that they had fled out with hardly anything on their backs except their toga-like white night-gowns.

The mob stood at the foot of the stairs, watching with dumbfounded faces the three hundred girls who descended crying out with open mouths, their wide-open eyes blurred by terror at the idea that a black-uniformed man was following them.

“Quickly, back, all of you!” I ordered with all the

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power of my lungs. My call brought to their attention the three dozen men who continued looking at them helplessly. An "aaauuh" of surprise was heard, and the shrieks died into a mute silence. They ran back, hopping up the stairs like an army of white mice.

The audience was too much shocked by the scene to speak or to take another step. Some of the faces had grown angry and blushed, others smiled conservatively, and one of the police had produced his revolver from his hip, prepared to shoot all its seven cartridges at the mysterious intruder who had threatened shame to three hundred females.

The door opened and a bundled figure in a fur coat entered. It was Miss Hlavda, the deaf sub-director, come to find out what whisper had disturbed the tranquillity of her dreams.

"What . . . what is happening? Why all these men here?" she asked vainly.

"It is nothing; I beg you, go," I was assuring the crowd of men. "It was all a misunderstanding. You see, the girls were on a picnic today, and it was their first experience—and one of them had a nightmare. She thought there was a man trying to break in," I explained cautiously and politely.

"But why did you call for help, then?" one stocky officer asked, looking at me with suspicious gray eyes. "We are uniformed men and it is our duty to be sure

that this house is safe. We must inspect the whole house."

"But I can't permit men to enter girls' dormitories," I protested authoritatively.

"Yes, that's the trouble with you, Miss Teacher. You first get frightened and give orders to call the police, and then you say it was for no reason. Eh, you are younger than most of your students, so I notice, Miss Teacher; of course, you don't know what honor means to females," an aged man of the neighborhood said in a loud, husky voice that shivered my hair and spine.

I said no more. The men proceeded up the stairs to inspect under the beds of the girls of the Institute Mëma Mbretneshe, whose honor and good name had been preserved with such care throughout the year.

News in the meantime spread through the city. The director arrived, completely dressed, even to his cane. The Minister of Education came, too, someone said, but I did not see him, for I was busy giving orders in the dormitories for the girls to keep their heads under the covers, while the gendarmes crawled under every bed to see what was hidden there.

After a long, fruitless search they went home. The girls wept and whispered; but near daybreak they fell into pleasant sleep. The servants and teachers remained awake, wondering how much this great scandal would hurt the good name of these three hundred girls.

On the following day, a yellow-enveloped letter was

handed to me. It was from the fierce hand of the Minister of Education. It said: "Miss Nexhmie Zaimi of Libohova, who on the previous night caused a panic among three hundred girls and who gave orders to call the city to come to their rescue without first notifying and asking the permission of her superior, Miss Elein Hlavda, is hereby warned for the first and last time that in case she repeats it, the ministry will be forced to expel her from the duty of teaching."

I, the cause . . . ? Or was this my director's revenge, I asked myself, which he threatened to take yesterday when he caught me riding that disreputable animal whose name he did not even wish to pronounce?

But what did it matter now? For here at last came the closing day of school. All departed; and I, one of the last as duty demanded, was stepping over the threshold, bidding a silent farewell to all those memories. Then I turned to take one more look at the empty Institute. "Tungjatjeta," said I; "I may see you again."

Chapter XII

“LAMTUMIRE”—“FAREWELL!”

I RECALLED the days of my childhood, when the only way to travel was by ox-cart or on horseback. But things had changed since, for now there were new means for traveling, imported from Europe to suit the modern man.

This was fortunate, however (in spite of the nation's money pouring out continually), for how could one imagine well-dressed officials and brilliantine-sparkling merchants taking their frequent trips on horseback or in primitive two-wheeled carts drawn by lazy oxen? Besides, ox-carts never had windows to protect the blue suits of merchants and the crow-black outfits of officials against the nuisance of the dusty roads. In the summer, the gray dust of highways, and of city streets as well, rose like clouds and tinted even one's eyelashes into a hue of fuzzy gray. In the winter, the sputtering of mud transformed one's suit into a resemblance of leopard's skin.

Automobiles, which old ladies had a way of mispronouncing “tromopils,” were now imported by dozens into

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every leading city. They were in colors of gray, green, and blue, and bore loud screeching horns that blew the soul out of wondering chickens and loaded donkeys and men, who scattered in perpetual fright as the *tromopils* thundered harmoniously through the city streets. Maybe, so said the old women, those golden-minded Europeans had swollen the four wheels of their *tromopils* with air to impress the owners of bulging pockets.

Since I was the daughter of Mustafa Zaimi of Libohova, the sister-in-law of Gani Chano, the niece of the Prokuror, the cousin of the Judge, et cetera, it was appropriate for me to hire a private Chevrolet which would take me to Libohova, where my parents were spending their vacation.

It had been decided that my brother-in-law was to accompany me on the trip, sacrificing his work and comfort, because a female could not travel alone. But, unexpectedly, Meto and Firdes returned from their honeymoon; and so, on the following daybreak, the three of us were setting out for our long trip to Libohova.

“May it be a smooth trip,” repeated my sister’s family from the gate-threshold as we stepped out for departure.

“Nexhmo, when will you be back? You forgot to tell me!” Hanife called after me as I prepared to step into the gasoline-smelling machine.

“I don’t know, Hano, but I will be back again some-

time," I replied. I turned suddenly toward the gate to take a last glance at my sister in whose heart I had found love and devotion since the death of Mana. She stood firmly among her seven little children, looking toward me steadfastly—perhaps suspecting something back of my reply.

"*Lantumire*," I waved to her for the last time; "Farewell!"

The engine raced, and "tat-tat" screeched the horn continually, ignoring the morning stillness of sleeping Tirana. The sun rose from behind the mountains as the machine made its exit from the last street of the capital.

The three of us sat quietly, thinking and digging into our minds secretly, as the automobile skimmed onward like a bird in flight. Meto perhaps wondered what was to be his reception from Father, returning home as he was with a self-chosen wife. Firdes had the same worries and troubles, but neither face showed signs of care. "They must still be in love with each other," I thought, "even without Baba's blessing."

Villages, pastures, olive groves, mountains, and herds of cattle came into sight and disappeared swiftly as we speeded onward like thunder.

On the second day we arrived in Gjirokastra, the famous city of Southern Albania which lay an hour from our home town. The magnificent walls of the fortress appeared on the crest as the city came into sight gradually

along the shelving mountain side, like steps on a pyramid.

At the market place, the engine stopped, for cars could travel no farther. The city streets were built in steps of hard rock, narrow and twisting between tall, ancient buildings.

“Where do we go now, Meto?” I ventured to ask my brother feebly, for my stomach was churning from the bumpy ride and my excitement.

“To a relative’s home to wait until the horses come,” he replied, leading the way before us as if this were a day like any other.

Firdes walked beside me, limping and swinging from side to side, for the heel of her shoe had fallen off. She was a bride and therefore had to wear shoes with high heels. And now the other heel, too, hung like a half-pulled tooth, and she had to walk the rest of the way on her suffering toes. Firdes looked to be in pain, but she could not speak because she was a bride. It was a real chance for Meto to find out how patient his wife could be.

“I wish you had hired horses, oy Brother,” I grumbled.

“Horses?” He turned at me with much surprise, as if I were suggesting camels from Arabia. “How could you two ride on horses, the way you are dressed?”

“But later on, when we start for Libohova, won’t it be the same?” I hastily replied in self-defense.

DAUGHTER OF THE EAGLE

"No, it won't. Father's sending a nice wide veil for each of you to wear."

"Veils?" I questioned angrily. "I won't wear one—I will tear it again, so be prepared." The blood pounded furiously upwards into my head, and my fingers twisted in a gesture of anticipation. After a little, I added:

"I won't wear it. I am a teacher now, and I can do what I please according to my thoughts."

"Nexhmo, don't get upset, for this is our home town where people are not modern and broad-minded as in Tirana; we have to act accordingly. And remember that though you are a teacher, I still remain your older brother."

"But what shall I do with my hat? Decorate the horse's head with it, I suppose!" I replied with consternation, realizing that I was to be trapped under a black veil at last.

The horses came, and the servant brought two balloon-like tcharchaffs. I put one on, for my anger had gone.

"Oh, how foolish I am," I exclaimed to myself. "I forget that I won't be wearing it for very long. Two more weeks, and I shall be gone."

"Nexhmo, you look so dignified inside the tcharchaff," my brother teased. "Exactly as a teacher should."

“LAM TUMIRE”—“FAREWELL!”

“Meto, I am not angry any more,” I replied, revealing an indirect apology. . . .

Tramp, tramp, tramp, the horse’s hoofs clamped rhythmically up the mountain road. It was the mountain on whose hard face rose Libohova.

We passed through passages of hard rock, up a ravine, and again a steep climbing began. Houses came into sight every now and then with orchards, gardens, and forests separating one from the other.

“I don’t think that there is another town in the world quite like Libohova,” I exclaimed proudly, but no one added to my remark. “Meto, why are the houses so far apart?” questioned I, curiously.

“Don’t you know? Here everybody has his orchard and his forest right beside his house.”

“But aren’t there wild animals in them?” again I inquired childishly, as if I had not been a high-school teacher for six whole months.

“Of course there are, plenty of them.”

The scene brought a wonder in my mind, for all I could hear was quietness.

“Welcome—mir se vini!” A large crowd was receiving us before I had time to realize that we had come to the home of my ancestors.

Father ran toward us, with a beaming anxiety to greet his children. The dozens of relatives who stood in circles

before the house, waiting to meet us, looked at Father with relaxed, pitiful expressions on their faces. They all wondered how Father could welcome his son with such joy. Had not Mehmet married Firdes without so much as consulting his father before he decided to fall in love with the brown-eyed female? What was worse, Meto had even gone away honeymooning with his new bride instead of having a wedding for a fortnight at least, where the dear and the undear ones could come and enjoy a bit of wedding merriment.

We approached the crowd, and for the course of an hour I was kissing hands and being kissed on both cheeks, all this accompanied by generous, affectionate embraces. There were my aunts, first cousins, second cousins, third cousins, fourth and fifth to meet and greet. Even the niece of the midwife who had received the father of my mother into the world, and an old shepherd's daughter of my ancestral family, and many such sorts of relatives were present. "If someone should come up to me and remark: 'I am your relative because we have been scorched by the same sun during summers and soaked by the same rain during winters,' she could not be a more distant relative than most of these," I thought.

About sixty of them remained for the evening to bless the food of a meal together and quote additional wishes that Firdes may bear fat sons, adding: "May Allah grant love between the stepmother and the new bride

“LAM TUMIRE” — “FAREWELL!”

—may no evil heart bring malice and witchery into the house.”

“Amen, amen,” replied Meto, comfortably.

At last they all departed with more glorious words to say, and all burning with family pride.

The next day I woke up early, and, half dressed, I began to inspect the house. The floors cracked as I made my way down the flights of stairs, and the china inside the cupboard tinkled musically as I passed through the kitchen and into the backyard.

In the garden I found the birds feasting on ripened fruit, and with a sudden urge I climbed one of the trees to feast on mulberries. A voice called from below; it was my stepmother, come to scold her stepchild because I was discovered perching in a tree.

“But can’t I do what I want?” I replied with a lack of politeness.

“Not here in Libohova. You must remember that you are supposed to wear a veil when you go out,” she said indignantly.

“Oh, I am not going to wear it any more. Besides, I am going away soon.”

“Going where?” she angrily questioned. “Your place is here at home with your father, so don’t think that you are going to teach people’s children any longer.”

“But I still am going away,” I replied angrily; “and no one will stop me.”

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On the same evening, I had my last conversation with Father. He looked sternly at me as he entered the room, and for a moment neither spoke.

“What’s this new air you have been wearing in your remarks, child? Why must you never grow up?”

“Baba, I know you have something to tell me; what is it?”

“I must first know what all these childish remarks about going mean,” he demanded, hardly reserving his anger.

“I am going away to America,” I said before realizing my slip. For many long months I had prepared for and feared the approach of that scene, and now I had exploded the news like a bomb before Father. No other news could have been more surprising, more painful, more scandalous to an Albanian parent.

“You are not going; you can’t go,” he said with anger. “If you ever attempt such a thing, I shall have the house surrounded by police.”

“Very well, Baba, I shall wait till the police are gone. They can’t go on surrounding our home for ever, but I can wait inside.”

My father’s temper rose to the verge of screeching for a revolver. My brother entered.

“What is happening, Baba?” he inquired, looking wide-eyed at me. “Has she gone insane?”

“Ask her,” Father replied, letting out a big sigh.

“LAM TUMIRE” — “FAREWELL!”

“I am going to America,” I said, shivering like a weed on a prairie.

“Going to America?” Meto repeated with a pale face. “Why, what will you do there? I can’t understand.”

“I am going to study, that’s what I am going for. I begged and begged you to let me go to Europe, but even you ignored my pleas. Now I am going and no one will stop me.”

“Sister, you sound as if you need chains.”

“But still I am going,” I thundered. “My visa is ready, my things are ready, and the *Conte di Savoia* leaves in two weeks.”

“But, Nexhmo,” Meto persisted with surprise, “America is poor, starving from hunger, deporting people back to their home countries—and you plan to go there. Are you insane?”

“Perhaps, but still I am going. I know you won’t give me either money or a word of blessing, but still I am going.”

“Nexhmo, you won’t be my child any longer if you go. I shall disown you for ever,” Father said in a stern voice. Through my tearful eyes, I could see the pain of his heart, and I knew that he would like to say: “Nexhmo, my pet child, how will I bear the scandal, the shame, the pain of your departure? Child, calm your infected mind and give up the idea.” But no matter, I was going!

“Very well, child, may it be a smooth trip. That is

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all I have to say. You were born stubborn, and stubborn you shall die. Anyhow, may it be a smooth trip," he sighed again. "But be prepared never to hear from me as long as I live."

"But, Baba, I am coming back! I shall be back as soon as I get my education," I pleaded among gushes of tears and sobs; but Father had left the room.

II

I woke up, one early morning, to prepare myself for the trip.

I dressed with shivering hands, rinsed my face with a few handfuls of cold water, swallowed a glass of milk, and, returning to my bedroom, I picked up my remnants that I was to carry with me.

Downstairs the servant waited with the horse which was to take me to the seaport of Santa Curanta, where the boat was to leave for Italy.

The clock said six; it was time for Father to pray. I went to his door and knocked, but no answer came. I opened the door after some hesitation, and discovered my father kneeling toward Mecca and whispering his morning prayers.

He turned his head.

"Baba, I am going. Lamtumire!"

“LAM TUMIRE”—“FAREWELL!”

“Farewell, Nexhmo, may it be a smooth trip,” he calmly replied. . . .

My hand shut the door again, and my feet carried me toward the staircase. Were there any more farewells to be said? No, for Meto had been called back to Tirana by the government. My father’s wife Teto was there, but why disturb her morning slumbers?

My right foot stepped in the stirrup, and with one jump I mounted the horse. “Gjok—Gjok,” the servant said to the horse, and without another word we were on our way.

My thoughts kept a rhythmic time with the horse’s clamp-clamping of his metal hoofs. The servant never said a half-word to me, but humbly led the way. I wished that I could talk to him and speak of any matter with the hope of chasing away my thoughts, but I would not let a servant glimpse my feelings.

We were descending, step by step, leaving more of Libohova behind us.

Could Father be by a window watching his daughter departing on her way, or could he not disturb his holy prayers?





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